

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESISシリーズ

境界線 上の ホライゾン II

上

電撃文庫

installation



installation

■Tachibana Gin■

Historically, her name was Tachibana Ginchiyo.

She was the woman who was to inherit the Tachibana family from her father, Tachibana Dousetsu.

However, her father chose the younger Muneshige to inherit the family and had him marry her. It is often said she begrudged her husband for this, but it is also said this is a later interpretation and she actually got along quite well with him.

I think either answer is probably inaccurate.

I bet it was a complex relationship.

As for her design, the two false arms are her most attractive feature, but the design shown here was refined for the version used in the novel.

(The upper arms were too long, she looked too much like a villain, and there was less information under her arms once her bust size was increased.)

If you look closely, the false arms have a cross design and her weapons have the same shape.

The inside controls gravity and inertia and has a space for storing her Arcabuz Cruz, so these false arms had to have cost a lot of money.

Dousetsu gave them to her, so he must spoil her a lot.

Even if neither of them realizes it.

A normal person could not survive with arms like these.

With fuel costs and the like, they are taking a lot out of her husband.

The arms only look so big because she is quite short. She is only about 150 cm tall.

She does not stand next to Muneshige even with her hat because she does not like how short she looks.

(Kawakami Minoru)



境界線上のホライゾン
Horizon on the Middle of Nowhere

—Why?

II

上

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

horizon

on the Middle
of Nowhere
episode.02





2

Character

Name: Felipe Segundo

Faction: Alcalá de Henares

Position: Chancellor and
Student Council President

Style: Versatile Tactician

Special: Worn-Out
Middle-Aged Man

Name: Juana

Faction: Alcalá de Henares

Position: Student Council
Vice President

Style: Versatile Administrator

Special: Female Teacher Type



1



4

world



They were Tsrhc during the Roman period, but they were later conquered by the Mlasi before becoming a Tsrhc nation again thanks to the Reconquista. Because they experienced a third conquest during the Harmonic Unification War, they are known as Tres España. Their Far East side comes from Minamoto land, so they are ruled by the long-lived race. They have prospered due to trade with the New World, but they are heading down the path of decline as their domestic industry weakens.

The turning point there is the Naval Battle of the Armada with England.

According to the Testament descriptions, Tres España loses, but it is being discussed how that will be interpreted.

Important

Name: Kobold

• “Tres España” •

Tres España is a seaside nation of relatively dry warmth at Shimonoseki which is the westernmost portion of Honshu. They have an excellent fleet of aerial ships and the people are wildly cheerful.

Their temperament

Name: Nate·Mitotsudaira



Uniform

1



“Far East Uniform”

Primary Academy: Musashi Ariadust Academy
Characteristics: Mid-weight uniform based on a black lined kimono



1

Uniform



3

Uniform

"Tres España Uniform"

Primary Academy: Alcalá de Henares
Characteristics: Heavyweight uniform with hints of the knights remaining



3

Uniform

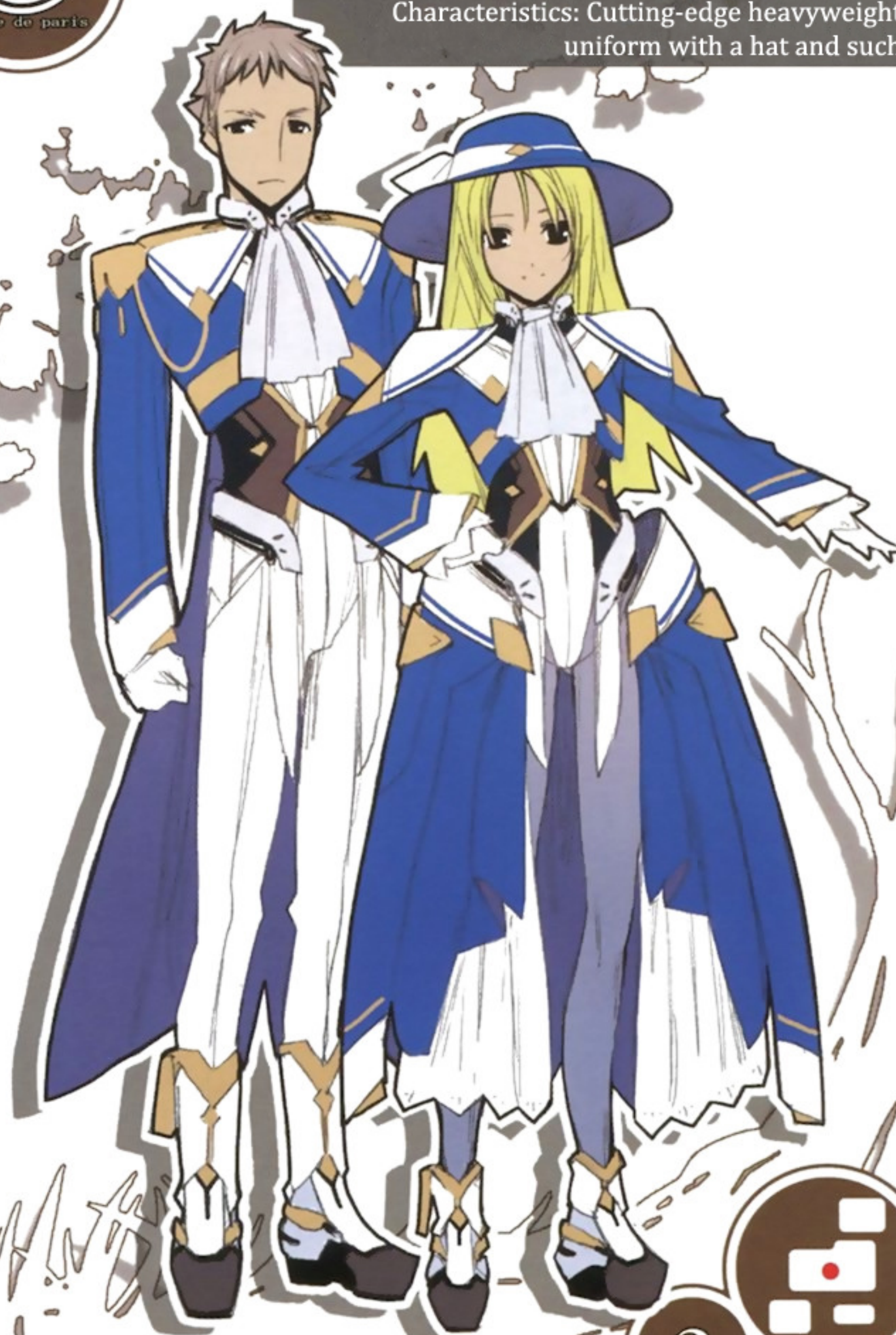


2

Uniform

"Hexagone Française Uniform"

Primary Academy: Ecole de Paris
Characteristics: Cutting-edge heavyweight uniform with a hat and such



2

Uniform

Uniform

5

"P.A.ODA Uniform"

Primary Academy: P.A.M.
Characteristics: Lightweight uniform
designed for desert regions



Uniform

5

Uniform

4

"M.H.R.R. Uniform"

Primary Academy: A.H.R.R.S.
Characteristics: Heavyweight uniform arranged
with the metal of the culture of steel



Uniform

4



7

Uniform

"Sviet Russia Uniform"

Primary Academy: J.M.K.

Characteristics: Heavyweight uniform which is top notch at keeping out the cold



Uniform

7



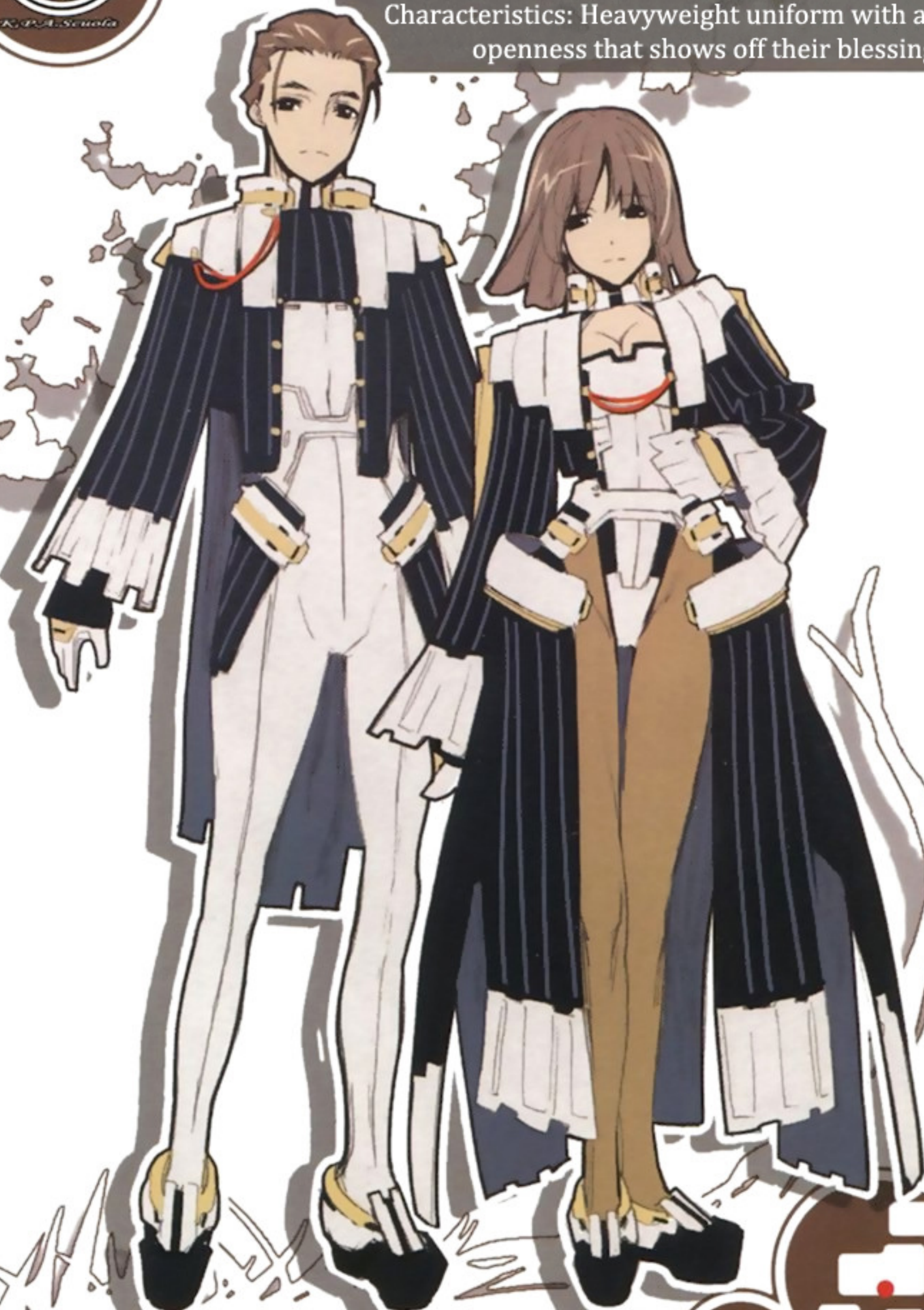
6

Uniform

"K.P.A. Italia Uniform"

Primary Academy: K.P.A.S.

Characteristics: Heavyweight uniform with an openness that shows off their blessings



Uniform

6





9

Uniform

"England Uniform"

Primary Academy: Oxford Academy
Characteristics: Heavyweight uniform
designed with winged races in mind



9

Uniform

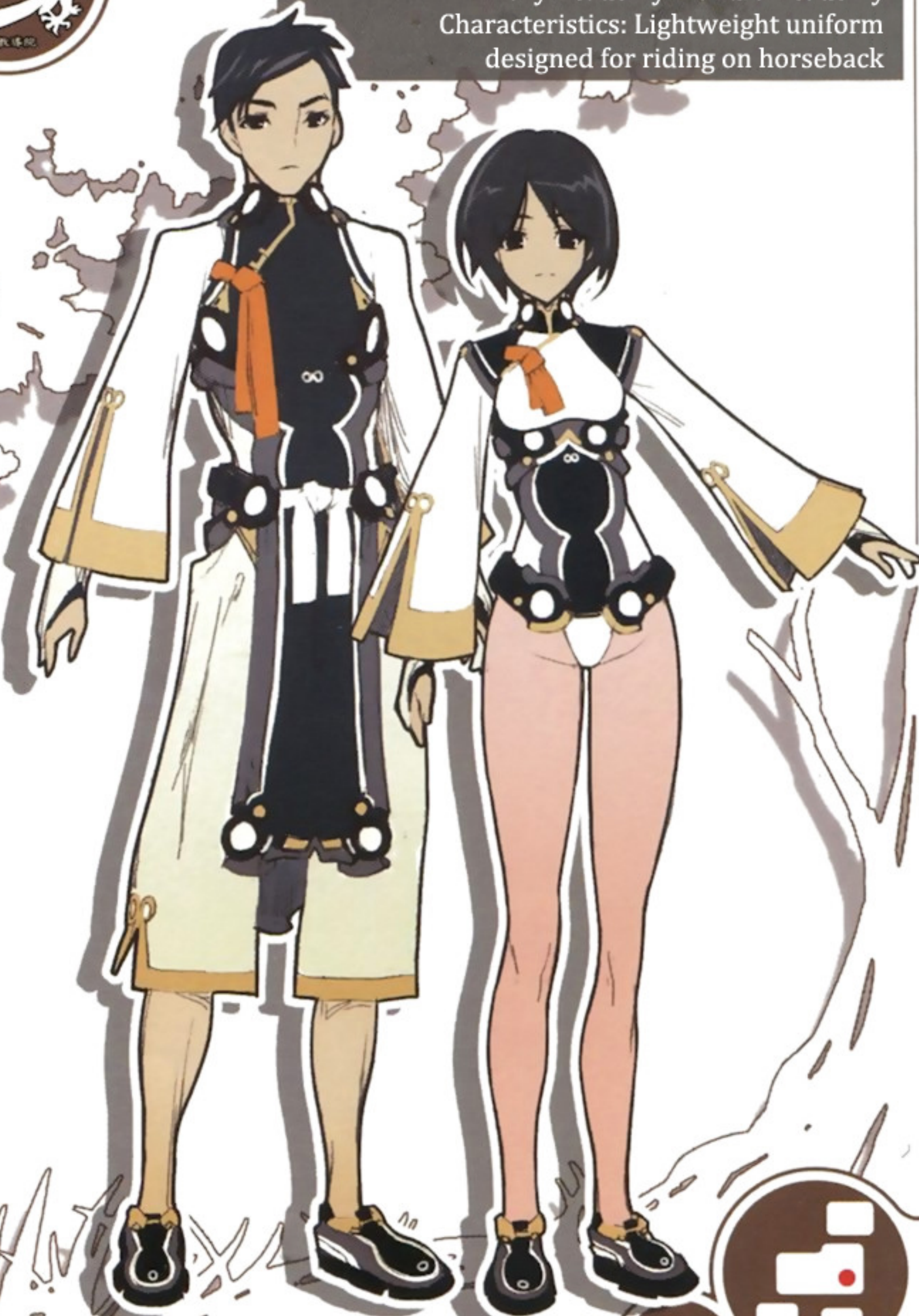


8

Uniform

"Qing-Takeda Uniform"

Primary Academy: Kakura Academy
Characteristics: Lightweight uniform
designed for riding on horseback



8

Uniform



極東史

Far Eastern History

First of all

Everybody is here only for an instant.
The people of the middle and early modern ages revel in that happiness
Hopefully, viewing them from a distance will be of some help



II 〈A〉

Table of Contents

Prologue: Lecturers Surrounded by Tranquility P23	Ch.24: Guide to a New World P739
Ch.01: Members of the Vermilion Field P55	Ch.25: Ruler of the Theatre P761
Ch.02: Uninvited Guest in the Classroom P69	Ch.26: Flower Presenter on the Street P781
Ch.03: Travelers in the Sky P95	Ch.27: One who Stands Alone in the Stage Wing P807
Ch.04: Those who Intermingle between Heaven and Earth P123	Ch.28: Defenders of the Bulwark P821
Ch.05: Restraint from Every Direction P159	Ch.29: Pilot in a Preparatory Place P843
Ch.06: Greeter on the Deck P205	Ch.30: Humanitarian of the Hunting Ground P869
Ch.07: Creators on the Battlefield P223	Ch.31: Protector on the Round Stage P885
Ch.08: Herald on the Stage P267	
Ch.09: Onlooker at the Crash Site P291	Table of Contents P17
Ch.10: Hopeful People with Nothing to Do P327	Character Introduction P18
Ch.11: Groups of National Leaders P341	Glossary P20
Ch.12: Those who Wait in a Place of Yearning P377	Study: ●Full Musashi Diagram● P54
Ch.13: Conversations between Worriers P403	Study: ●Ship Classes● P158
Ch.14: Distant Affirmers P431	Study: ●Map of England● P518
Ch.15: Immigrants to England P457	Study: ●Importation of the Potato● P626
Ch.16: Interceptor in a Place of Peace P473	Study: ●Landsknechte● P820
Ch.17: Recluses around the Corner P489	
Ch.18: One who Remembers in a Place of Forgetting P519	Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)
Ch.19: Those Descending to the Surface P557	Cover Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)
Ch.20: Those Meeting in a Separate Place P627	Book Design Concept: TENKY
Ch.21: The Two in the Meeting Place P639	
Ch.22: Replier on the Chopping Block P379	
Ch.23: Scarred Ones in a Closed Room P711	

 Aoi Kimi Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tensioned and selfish in practice.	 Aoi Toori Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.
 Asama Tomo Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.	 Azuma Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.
 Adele Balfette From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.	 Itou Kenji Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.
 Ohiroshiki Ginji Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.	 Kiyonari Urquiaga 2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.
 Shirojiro Bertoni Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.	 Tenzou Crossunite 1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.
 Toussaint Neshinbara Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.	 Naomasa 6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.
 Nate Mitotsudaira 5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.	 Nenji Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.
 Noriki Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.	 Heidi Augesvarer Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
 Hassan Furubushi Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.	 Persona-kun Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
 Horizon Ariadust Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa. Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismoi Oplo.	 Honda Futayo Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.
 Honda Masazumi Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.	 Malga Naruze 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
 Margot Naito 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.	 Miriam Poqou Girl who stays in her room because she requires a wheelchair.
 Mukai Suzu Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.	

character

Academy Affiliates



Oriotorai Makiko

High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.



"Musashi"

Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.

Sanyou Mitsuki

Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.



Sakai Tadatsugu

Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.



Yoshinao

King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.

Tres España



Felipe Segundo

Chancellor and student council president. Hard-working middle-aged man.



Velázquez

Secretary. Long-lived. Painter and Testamenta Arma user. Middle-aged.



Tachibana Muneshige

Peerless in the West. Logismoi Oplo "Lype Katathlipse" user. Tres España's 1st special duty officer. A fairly nice person and adopted into his family by marriage.



Tachibana Gin

3rd special duty officer. Tachibana Muneshige's wife and false arms girl.



Juana

Vice president of the student council. Female teacher type. Logismoi Oplo user.



Hironaka Takakane

Vice chancellor. Ghost. Baseball team captain. Testamenta Arma user.



Era Fusae

2nd special duty officer. Long-lived. Ghost. Takakane's wife. Track team captain.



Valdés Siblings

4th and 5th special duty officers. Baseball team members.

England



Elizabeth

Chancellor and student council president. Fairy Queen. Ex. Caliburn user.



William Cecil

Vice president of the student council. Competitive eater and weight user.



Ben Jonson

Secretary. Black athlete poet. President of the literature club.



Charles Howard

Naval admiral. Wealthy common sense man. No combat ability.



Francis Drake

Hard Wolf and naval vice admiral. Testamenta Arma user.



Thomas Cavendish

Drake and the others' underclassman. Mermaid woman.



Christopher Hatton

Lord Chancellor and Living Bones.



Walter Raleigh

Far Easterner. Elizabeth's wartime advisor.



Mary

Elizabeth's elder half sister. Scheduled to be executed for attempting to assassinate the queen.



Robert Dudley

Vice chancellor. Thin woman. Testamenta Arma user.



Nicholas Bacon

Hammer user and trickster. Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England.



Thomas Shakespeare

Logismoi Oplo user. Half-lived race. Vice president of the literature club.



John Hawkins

Drake's companion. Swimsuit man.



Grace O'Malley

Female pirate of Scotland. Elizabeth's friend.



F. Walsingham

Automaton leader of the public morals committee. Spymaster.

Other

Innocentius

Pope-Chancellor. Leader of the Catholics and representative of K.P.A. Italia.

Oda Nobunaga

A name-inheritor appeared recently, but that inheritor has not appeared out of fear of Testament Union assassins.

F

- Fan Gang:** Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
- Far East:** Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
- Fino Alba:** K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

- God of War:** A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation:** No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.
- Grande y Felicísima Armada:** Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.

H

- Harmonic Territory:** Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War:** A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World:** A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française:** Mouri clan + France.
- History Recreation:** Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells:** Tsrhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.

I

- Inherited Name:** The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings:** Blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO:** The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment:** Means "understood". Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia:** Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Ley line:** The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.

A

- Academy:** An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules:** The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Amako clan:** Former IZUMO land. Destroyed by Mouri and Hexagone Française.
- Apocalypse:** The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ArchsArt:** England's primary corporation.
- Armada battle:** A naval battle fought between England and Tres España. Tres España planned to land on England but their fleet was destroyed.
- ATELL:** The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

- Blessings:** The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

- Catholic (Old Faith):** The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.
- Chancellor's Officers:** An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
- Contradiction Allowance:** The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

- Divine States:** Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon:** A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

- EDEL Brocken (Overlooking Magic Mountain):** Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.
- Emperor:** A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England:** Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether:** Component that makes up contradiction allowing space.
- Ether Engine:** An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel:** Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- Excalibur:** Has a first and second version.
- External Blessings:** Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

words

- Sign Frame:** Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
- Song of Passage:** Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.
- Spirit Spell:** Primitive spells used by talking to and borrowing the power of spirits, which are ether with a will of its own.
- Spell:** Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Student Council:** The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution:** Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.
- Sviet Rus:** Uesugi clan + Russia.

T

- Tes./Testament:** Means "understood".
- Testament:** A history book that provides the history of the earth's previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions:** History of the earth's previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union:** An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Testamenta Arma (Testament Public Weapons):** Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.
- Tres España:** Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc:** A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.
- Ley line Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and refines either from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismoi Oplo (Deadly Sin Weapons):** Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

M

- Magic:** Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.:** Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa:** Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mlasi:** A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse (Executive Tool):** A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi:** Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.
- Musashi Ariadust Academy:** The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician:** A religion's worshiper.

O

- Offering:** Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Water:** Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A.ODA:** Oda clan + Osman (Ottomans).
- Peace of Westphalia:** The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant (New Faith):** A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council:** Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

Q

- Qing:** China.

S

- San Mercado (Pure Metropolis):** Tres Español brand.
- Shinto:** Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises:** IZUMO's shrine brand.

PROLOGUE

"Lecturers Surrounded by Tranquility"



What kind of time
Is a time of peace?

Point Allocation (Exposition)

What kind of time

Is a time of peace?

Point Allocation (Exposition)

Several ships were surrounded by the white sky.

They sailed through the sky while surrounded by cocoon-like walls of white fog.

Both the left and right had three ships front to back and the center had two ships front to back. Altogether, the group of ships measured approximately 8 kilometers in length. Written on the bow of each ship was the name Musashi followed by the individual ship's name.

Some students were listening to their teacher in a large park on the second portside ship, Murayama.

As they sat on the grass, they could hear the chirping of birds from the surrounding forest as well as the words of their track suit wearing teacher named Oriotorai.

“Okay, that’s enough for today’s morning training. I see all of you can keep up with me until Murayama now.”

The students sitting on the grass in front of her were panting and gulping down their sports drinks.

“After a five minute break, we’ll have first period out here. Okay?”

The students exchanged a glance and nodded once.

Their voices rang out into the white sky in unison.

“Judge.”

That was their word of response.

One of the students, the track suit wearing Honda Masazumi, let out a breath and reached for the bamboo bottle attached to a hard point at her waist.

She wet her throat with water she had drawn at Musashi Ariadust Academy back at the rear central ship of Okutama. She wished she had been able to bring a sports drink like her classmate Ohiroshiki or old acquaintance and vice chancellor Honda Futayo.

...But I don't have the money.

During second period, she would be working as a lecturer at the elementary school on Tama. She felt no guilt because she had completed the substitute exam for the lessons she was missing, but she felt she had to do her best to play the role of the teacher. Also...

...I should stop by the wholesale store on Tama and pick up that item father reserved.

The item was the cleansing toilet seat “Rapid Fire” which had become popular lately. It was an IZUMO product, but an anti-ship bombardment version had been released as a tie-in with the TV anime Netagashima and it was constantly sold out.

Her father had somehow managed to acquire one and she had assumed he would use it as a bribe during a business negotiation, but it seemed he would be using it at home. She thought it might be a status symbol for him. That morning, he had told her, “I am going to be busy with negotiations today, so you go pick it up for me. If I asked Konishi, he might take it for himself.”

“Well, at least he’s started coming back home recently.”

As she muttered to herself, she undid her hair which had been tied up while she ran. She wet her lips with water and poured the extra water into the ditch cutting across the grass. Some brown algae creatures appeared from within the ditch.

“Thank you, Masazumi.”

“Water.”

“Masazumi. Water.”

“Masawater?”

She found it amusing how they would appear almost anywhere, but she was not sure what to make of that last one.

Masazumi sighed and looked up into the sky.

The sky was white.

Musashi was wrapped in the color white, but it was not due to the clouds.

“Let’s see... We’re sailing along the northern coast of Tres España in stealth mode, right?”

This has been a lot of trouble, thought Masazumi. It’s been two weeks since the Mikawa incident, hasn’t it?

“Our environment really has changed.”

Masazumi decided to sit on the grass.

...A lot has happened.

Mikawa had been destroyed two weeks before, they had rescued Horizon the next day, and they had announced they would resolve the Apocalypse.

...Musashi has more or less picked a fight with the Testament Union.

Ever since Mikawa, Musashi had remained in stealth mode except when stopping at a reservation. They were travelling in order to resolve the emergency of the Apocalypse, so they were not informing the Testament Union of their course. The marker signal used to indicate their location was sent to a set point that relayed it on.

And Musashi's destination while hiding like that was...

“England, the floating island above the Sea of Japan.”

England did not have provisional rule over any Far East territory and had once acted as an intermediary between the Far East and the other nations. Masazumi had decided England would be the safest place to learn how the other nations had reacted.

To avoid travelling along the northern coast of the Seto Inland Sea which was lined with European powers, Musashi had travelled clockwise along the southern coast from Shikoku to Kyushu.

They were currently travelling east between the islands of Tsushima and Iki near the Kawajiri Cape on the northern coast of Shimonoseki which corresponded to the Iberian Peninsula.

In stealth mode, it would take another two days to reach England, but they were apparently close enough to view the floating island of England from the bow.

Masazumi thought this was a lot of trouble, but she also thought it was necessary. After all...

...We already announced we would resolve the Apocalypse.

She herself had given that as a justification for Musashi and the Far East to rescue Horizon.

But the Logismoi Oplo based on Horizon's emotions worried her. Their creator, Lord Motonobu, had said they could influence the Apocalypse, but she did not know how exactly they would resolve anything.

But despite not knowing, Masazumi thought to herself while taking a sip of water from her bamboo bottle. Despite not knowing so much, she knew what had to be done.

There were three things:

1: Do not take any actions that will provoke the Testament Union.

2: Retrieve the Logismo Oplo.

3: Gain the approval of as many countries as possible to gain an advantage during the Peace of Westphalia.

If they could do that, she felt they would approach a solution to the Apocalypse. She just wished they had some kind of feedback to know they were on the right track.

The coming of the Apocalypse could be seen in the strange phenomena and disappearances, but it still felt unreal to most people.

Wanting a sense of crisis to consolidate those within Musashi was a dangerous idea, but at the same time...

“Masazumi, what are you thinking about?”

“Eh?”

Masazumi quickly turned around and found golden eyes looking at her.

It was Mitotsudaira.

Masazumi had become lost in thought, so she relaxed her shoulders and turned her focus to the outside world.

When she looked around, she saw her various classmates taking a break.

“They all have their own way of staying hydrated, don’t they?”

As Masazumi watched on, her classmates drank their drinks and caught their breath.

Treasurer Bertoni and Heidi were drinking blended health tea. Secretary Neshinbara had taken a slow pace, so he calmly typed some text into a sign frame without drinking anything.

As for the special duty officers, Crossunit the ninja was discussing a cross review of a porn game with half-dragon and fellow special duty officer Urquiaga. One-armed Naomasa was smoking something smelling of mint in her kiseru.

Mitotsudaira, who had werewolf blood and still wore her uniform, was drinking tea from a tea set she had taken out from somewhere. The Technohexen combo of the descended angel and fallen angel Naito and Naruze were...

“What? Is Naito asleep?”

The blonde-haired and gold-winged Naito had fallen asleep while leaning against the black-haired and black-winged Naruze’s shoulder. Naruze looked worriedly at her partner.

“Work has been putting a large burden on her lately. ...The flight parts of my Weiss Fräulein were completely broken, so I can only work on land. I’m saving up as much of my internal *auspuff* in an Orei Metallo for her, but it looks like Margot isn’t using it.”

Neshinbara nodded when he heard that.

He glanced over at the black-haired Technohexen.

“We’re giving you a lot of trouble. ...And it is thanks to your victory that we are here now.”

“Was that meant to be a compliment, four-eyes? Are you telling us to just accept the damage done?” asked Naruze with half-lidded eyes.

Her words were a bit harsh, but no one bothered to turn around.

...I guess comments on that level aren't serious.

Unlike Masazumi, the others in the class had apparently been together since elementary school.

They understood the trick to dealing with each other.

Meanwhile, the slime named Nenji and the incubus named Itoken were speaking.

“Hm. When I run around and work up a sweat, I lose weight and my volume shrinks!”

“I know what you mean, Nenji-kun! My body is made up of gas, so running around lowers my overall density a bit!”

...You two need to take better care of your bodies.

Hassan's bamboo bottle contained curry.

...What a close group.

As Masazumi thought so, she was approached by Asama who wore the red and white track only used by shrine maidens.

“Oh, Masazumi. I'm about to make sports drinks for Kimi, Suzu-san, and the others. Do you want some?”

These days, tea ceremony club members fire arrows and have all sorts of other idiosyncrasies, don't they? added Masazumi silently.

She then turned her attention to Aoi, the president of both the academy and the student council, and the automaton who was both a Logismo Oplo and princess of Matsudaira.

...There's such a thing as being too close, Horizon.

Horizon gave Aoi a bamboo bottle containing the drink she had prepared.

“Judge. As you made a request yesterday, I woke up early this morning and tried my hand at a powdered drink. It has the shop owner’s endorsement, so how about a cup, Toori-sama?”

“Ohhh! You put some effort into this! The problem with powdered sports drinks these days is how they all go for some confusing joke like the cucumber flavored Doctor Kappa. Anyway, I’m thirsty, so I’ll take some!”

“Judge,” said Horizon with a nod.

Aoi took a large swig from the bamboo bottle and Horizon gave a calm comment with expressionless half-lidded eyes.

“It is sports corn soup.”

Aoi spat the drink out into the center of everyone else, so they began to scream and flee.

Aoi trembled and said, “Nwoh! Wh-what is with this...u-um...let’s call it an original flavor! The hot corn and the saltiness hit you as soon as it enters your mouth, but it has a lemon flavor too!? Amazing!”

“Toori-sama, it smells of vomit.”

“Wh-what!? How did you so perfectly hit the word I went out of the way not to say!?”

“Judge. The shop owner praised it as perfectly recreating a morning with a hangover.”

“Please listen to what people tell you! And aren’t you being awfully detached about this!?”

“What are you talking about? I am merely being kind. Now, finish it off before it gets cold.”

“I-I don’t like this kindness!! ...By the way, Horizon, what’s in your bottle?”

“Judge.” Horizon held her bamboo bottle out toward Aoi. “This one is a normal sports drink, so it is a bit boring.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that,” said Aoi as he took the bottle and took a swig to cleanse his palate.

“This one is a normal sports corn soup,” said Horizon calmly.

Aoi spat it out into the center of everyone once more. As he trembled, Horizon spoke with half-lidded eyes.

“I made too much. It is merely repeating the same joke, so I thought I would be boring.”

“Huh!? Huh!? That’s what you meant by boring!? That!? Am I the one at fault here!?”

“Now, please dispose of it all before it gets cold.”

“Enough of this partial kindness! And you told me to ‘dispose’ of it, didn’t you!? Didn’t you!?”

As Aoi lay collapsed on the ground after disposing of both bottles’ worth, Oriotorai watched on.

She nodded to herself twice.

“Okay. With that, Masazumi will give today’s lecture.”

“H-how did you reach that conclusion, sensei!?”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Oriotorai while waving her hands and smiling.

“During second period, you work as a part-time lecturer at the elementary school on Tama, right? There’s not that much difference between elementary school and high school, so try it out.”

Oriotorai's instructions were to give a lecture on the origin of Tres España.

There was a good reason to have a lecture on Tres España while on the way to England.

...England and Tres España are enemies.

So before arriving in England, it was worthwhile to know about England's troublesome opponent.

So I have to talk about world history, thought Masazumi as she glanced over at Horizon and Aoi who lay unmoving next to the automaton.

"Everyone, Toori-sama is taking a nap. Please remain outside this line so as not to disturb him," said Horizon.

She proceeded to draw a chalk outline of his collapsed body.

Once they finished passing through Tres España, they would arrive in England.

...How that idiot acts in England will determine everything from here on.

Musashi's overall objective had been decided during the battle of Mikawa, but they had not yet shown how they would act when faced with other countries.

Aoi had said he was prepared to take over the world in order to regain the Logismo Oplo which were made from Horizon's emotions. However, they had not decided how to confront the other nations when it came down to it.

Their meeting with England would be used to test them. And how they dealt with England would be used as a basis for how Musashi dealt with the other countries.

For that reason, they had to be prepared to confront England in negotiations, battle, or whatever else was needed. If possible, Masazumi wanted to show Aoi how Musashi should deal with England. That policy would remain the same for the other countries, but...

...This is the last chance to change our mind or turn back.

She did not think it would be easy, but she thought they had a chance with England. After all...

“Aoi, wake up. You will eventually have to make a decision and I will prepare the stage for that decision. But you need to have the proper knowledge to make the decision.”

First, there was the enemy nation giving England trouble.

“I will now give a lecture on Tres España. Can someone assist me with a sign frame? I only have my handheld.”

“Judge. I will do it,” said Mitotsudaira with a nod.

She walked in front of the others, stood next to Masazumi, and expanded a torii-shaped sign frame measuring a meter square. Oriotorai gave a nod when she saw it.

“Okay, the two of you can give the lecture. Mitotsudaira, you go first so you can show Masazumi how to use the sign frame.”

“Judge,” replied the two girls before taking a breath.

At the same time, Mitotsudaira called up a map of Tres España with Shimonoseki in the center.

“I shall begin then,” she said with no shyness.

Mitotsudaira began her explanation below the afternoon sun. She placed a hand on Shimonoseki displayed on the sign frame.

“The western side of Honshu centered on Shimonoseki and the northern side of Kyushu make up the country known as Tres España. Tres España did not originally hold north Kyushu, but they indirectly control the territory of the

Oouchi family after the unification of the Oouchi and Ootomo families. Both Oouchi and Ootomo were dependents of the Kamakura Shogunate. And do you know what that means?”

Kimi suddenly stood up and waved her hand invitingly.

“Heh heh heh. Female knight, are you challenging someone as wise as me!? Fine, I will answer! But I am so clever I know things that one could never know! I am super clever! However, the stripping rule is in effect for the beautiful, so I hope you are prepared! They say the beautiful die young, and the beautiful’s relative lack of clothing makes that very true for the stripping rule!”

What a waste of oxygen, thought Mitotsudaira as she cleared her throat.

“Anyway, let us continue. Let’s see... Their dependency on the Kamakura Shogunate brings us back to the Genpei War. When mankind descended from the heavens and created the Harmonic Divine States, humans were not the only ones to remain in the real Divine States as residents of the Far East. Interestingly enough, an investigation of bloodlines discovered non-human races included in the bloodlines of Far East residents. They chose to remain in the real world. And during the history recreation, two of those races prospered after being given a family of their own. Those two families were the Minamoto clan and the Taira clan. The Minamoto clan went to the long-lived race and the Taira clan went to the giants. At this time, the environment was still too harsh for humans to...”

Mitotsudaira cleared her throat and added, “I mean people.”

...This kind of consideration may actually make things worse. Still...

“Anyway, the environment was still too harsh for people to easily live in, so they got help from the long-lived race and the giants. After all, part of the recreation led to the word ‘apocalypse’ being used quite a lot in that era as well.”

“?”

Toori tilted his head. As Mitotsudaira wondered what that was about, he folded his arms, stared at her, and asked a question.

“Nate, I’m an idiot, so I wouldn’t know. Was there an Apocalypse a long time ago too?”

“Judge,” replied Mitotsudaira. “Each country, including the Far East, has experienced a period known as the Apocalypse a few times in the past.”[\[1\]](#)

Mitotsudaira opened a new sign frame and reversed the display.

“In the Far East, it was said an age in which the teachings of the Buddha would no longer apply would arrive 1000 years after the establishment of his religion. Using the western calendar, it was thought to begin in the year 1052. People long thought this ‘apocalypse’ was coming. However, it did not refer to a literal destruction of the world. It was thought to be a lawless age without peace.”

Mitotsudaira began writing years on the sign frame.

“However, this period in the Far East saw the end of the age of nobles and the beginning of the age of the samurai. Every nation entered a period of war and the world fell into chaos. This had a negative effect on the ley lines, so it seems strange phenomena began occurring frequently across the land. The effects appeared in the harmonic world as well, so the knights and your ancestors appeared on the orders of the current leaders, the Testament Union, and the emperor. For a period of time, the history recreation was ignored and attacks were made across national borders.

“For the purposes of the history recreation, the successors of that 700-man unit were treated as if they did not exist. All information on them was deleted and it is said they took on the role of an elite unit called the Testament Cross-Borders Unit. A framework for this remains in each country’s academy as a post, so-...”

Mitotsudaira realized she was drifting off topic.

The Testament Cross-Borders Unit was thought of as an urban legend-like existence. Each country had an official position for it, but no records were kept as

they existed outside the rules of the history recreation. As such, their activities were always spoken of like rumors.

...I often heard those rumors when I was in Hexagone Française.

However, their actions had stopped producing even rumors after the Harmonic Unification War. That combined with the lack of records had caused knowledge of them to fade. Due to the weak connection between nations due to the Testament Union and the development of spells, weapons, transportation technology, and divine transmission technology thanks to interpretation of the history recreation, their role had dropped to merely providing aid between regions.

Currently, stories of them were passed by word of mouth and derivations of them were classic contents of doujinshi and the like.

“Now then.” Mitotsudaira looked at the others and brought the conversation back to the main point. “Back to the Genpei War. As the world saw an ‘apocalypse’ on the horizon, the Taira clan used military might to subjugate the world. However, the Buddhist power they attacked expanded, stole the authority from the nobles, and the world was ultimately thrown into chaos.

“It was the Minamoto clan that suppressed this. After the Genpei War, The Taira clan was destroyed and the Minamoto clan created the Kamakura Shogunate, but it was destroyed due to internal conflict. However, some dependents of the Kamakura Shogunate remained in places. Some of those were the Oouchi and Ootomo families. As they came from Kamakura, they were primarily made up of the long-lived race.

“When Tres España arrived to conquer them, they sided with Tres España earlier than anyone else. This was partially due to knowing Tres España would prosper in the history recreation, but it was also because Tres España historically contained a lot of the long-lived race that possessed Celtic blood.”

Mitotsudaira turned to Masazumi.

“Now, as for the origin of Tres España, I believe Masazumi will be explaining that while including the political aspect. Please give us a quick lecture.”

As the lecture was passed to her, Masazumi thought.

...I can speak about the political side, but the history is a bit difficult.

Then again, she had been planning to do it all herself originally.

“I will start with the main point. This is how Tres España came about.” She took a breath. “Many different clans and nations took turns controlling the Iberian Peninsula on the western end of Europe and ultimately the Catholic Reconquista unified the area.”

Masazumi stepped in front of Mitotsudaira’s sign frame. She found it easier to speak while in front because it was similar to having her back to the blackboard during the elementary school classes she taught.

“Is it set up so I can write on it?” she asked Mitotsudaira.

“Judge. You don’t mind if the device is a bit rough, do you?”

“No.”

As Mitotsudaira operated the device, Masazumi drew a white circle around the eastern mountainous region and coast.

“Just like England, the Iberian Peninsula was originally ruled the Celts and various other clans.” Masazumi tapped a finger on the central area and the eastern mountains. “Different areas were cut off by the Pyrenees and the other mountains in the area, so even when Rome arrived and conquered, the people only lived on the coast and near the mountains. The central area remained empty. However...”

Masazumi drew an arrow from the east to the west. The arrow pointed to the southern coast.

“However, after the Roman rule, the Germanic tribes travelled eastward en masse.”

...This part gets a bit tricky.

After all...

“What you have to remember is that the ‘Germanic tribes’ are not one single group. The term refers to all the various tribes that lived in the Northern European area of Germania.”

A uniform culture had spread throughout the Far East, so they did not have a concept of “tribes” which held unique cultures and civilizations.

Also, the Far East was primarily filled with farmers, so they tended to settle in a single location. The Germanics were hunting tribes, so they would stay on the move. They would travel vast distances without building villages and they would hunt and wage war all the while.

Rome had tried to get along peacefully with them when they passed through or collided, but...

“Among these tribes were a people known as the Goths. They built up so much momentum that they passed right through the Romans to the west and ended up at the Iberian Peninsula.”

Masazumi smiled at how well her explanation was going.

“In other words, you could say the Goths ‘got’ too far.”

That joke slipped out.

...Oh, no!

Masazumi froze in place while still smiling.

She had prepared this lecture for the elementary school, so she had prepared some jokes she thought they would like. It would also make a good mnemonic for them to remember it with. However, she received only silence from this class that often derived its humor from harshly mocking each other.

...I just stuck myself out there as a target!

Just as she thought that, a certain idiot forcefully stood up.

“Everyone! Everyone! Don’t attack Seijun too much! Listen! She’s doing her best to fit in with all of us! The way she’s putting up such a desperate attack is quite noble! Okay, I think we should appreciate her efforts. Isn’t that right, Seijun!?”

Masazumi swung her fist up and the idiot frantically hid behind the others. She sighed and continued.

“Th-the Goths created the Visigothic Kingdom, but it became very Roman due to interaction with the Romans. This continued even after Rome’s destruction. They were sealed in the Iberian Peninsula by Clovis, the founder of the Frankish Kingdom which became the foundation of Hexagone Française. They managed to live in peace, but then...”

On the southwestern edge of the Iberian Peninsula, Masazumi drew an arrow coming from the south and a stick figure.

“Internal conflict over money and the position of king threw the Visigothic Kingdom into chaos and the Mlasi crossed the ocean into the Iberian Peninsula after extending their influence to the northern coast of Africa. These Mlasi were a group driven away by the other Mlasi forces and they conquered the Iberian Peninsula and named it the Caliphate of Córdoba.”

Masazumi then had Mitotsudaira bring up a new sign frame. She wrote the following sequence on it:

Celts and other tribes -> Roman conquest -> Migration of Germanic Tribes leads to the Visigothic Kingdom -> Internal strife leads to the Caliphate of Córdoba

“Judge. Do you all understand? England has the Norman Conquest where the Normans conquered England, and Tres España also has several layers of ruling powers over its history.”

“Seijun... I’ve always thought the Norman Conquest sounds really erotic. Don’t you agree?”^[2]

“How about you die in two seconds?”

“Well, it makes it sound like you have to mount them. And what about the Normans themselves? Do they mount men?”

“So what does that make the Germans? Do you think they’re made of gel?”^[3]

Everyone turned to Nenji.

“Where were you born?”

“I have been on Musashi as far back as I can remember.”

Everyone took that to mean he was a Musashi German. Masazumi could only sigh.

“The remnants of the other kingdoms were driven to the northern edge of the Iberian Peninsula by the Caliphate of Córdoba. They later received support from France and gained enough power to drive the Mlasi force to the south over a few hundred years.

“That was the Reconquista. It ended in 1492, but earlier in 1469, representatives of two of the allied kingdoms recovering the Iberian Peninsula, the prince of Aragon and the princess of Castile, married and became the Catholic Monarchs. That formed the foundation of modern Tres España.”

And...

“The child of those Catholic Monarchs was the woman who became known as Juana the Mad. Juana married M.H.R.R.’s Duke of Burgundy, so her son Carlos I ruled both Tres España and M.H.R.R. He was the previous chancellor of Tres España. His children were Felipe II and his younger sister, the second Juana. They are the ones who have inherited the position of Tres España’s chancellor and student council vice president.”

Masazumi snapped her fingers and Mitotsudaira copied down the following family line.

The Catholic Monarchs

↓

Juana the Mad (Political marriage with M.H.R.R.’s Duke of Burgundy)

↓

Carlos I (Karl V – M.H.R.R. Emperor-Chancellor and Tres España president)

↓

Felipe II (Tres España chancellor)/Juana II (Tres España student council vice president)

“Needless to say, these people are not actually all related. They all inherited their names.

“After the death of her husband, the first Juana became known as the mad queen and was kept confined. The son Carlos I, who was the previous chancellor of Tres España, was quite active after her death and was a complicated person.”

Masazumi manipulated the screen to display the area to the east of Shimonoseki. It now showed the northeastern portion of Izumo.

“This is the Netherlands or Holland. Tres España controls the area, but Carlos I was born here. M.H.R.R. had been shaken by a religions revolution, so they saw

meaning in giving power to Tres España which was prospering as a Catholic nation. Tres España wanted to prosper as an emerging nation, so they saw meaning in gaining the name and authority of the Emperor-Chancellor which was an old representative of Catholicism.”

“Judge,” said Urquiaga with a nod. “That is about when my grandfather lamented of the poor crops and left Tres España. The first Juana’s marriage and Carlos I ruling two nations was one thing that supported Tres España’s later success.”

“Judge. That’s right. Carlos I became the chancellor of España and, according to the history recreation, also became the Emperor-Chancellor of M.H.R.R. as Karl V. He was a powerful chancellor whose rule spread across Europe and even into Africa.”

...This part gets tricky.

“Carlos I travelled across Europe as the chancellor of Tres España and as Carlos V of M.H.R.R., but he primarily lived in M.H.R.R. And once the inheritor of the name Felipe II was officially determined, he retired. That is why the current leaders of Tres España have no direct connection to Carlos I. To strengthen their influence, they include a lot of those who have a second inherited name from the Far East and a lot of the long-lived race. I’m sure some of you already know this, but here is a list.”

<Tres España, Alcalá de Henares: List of Representative Students>

Chancellor: Felipe II – Also inherited the name Oouchi Yoshinaga. Also holds the position of student council president. Far Easterner. Likes office work.

Student Council Vice President: Juana – Also holds the position of treasurer. Far Eastern long-lived woman. Logismoi Oplo user.

Secretary: Velázquez – Far Eastern long-lived man. Painter. Testamenta Arma user.

Vice Chancellor: Hironaka Takakane – Also inherited the name of Army Leader Pérez. Captain of the baseball team. Ghost. Testamenta Arma user.

1st Special Duty: Tachibana Muneshige – Also inherited the name of Postman García. Currently retired?

2nd Special Duty: Era Fusahide – Also inherited the name of Naval Leader Álvaro. Captain of the track and field team. European long-lived ghost.

3rd Special Duty: Tachibana Gin – Tachibana Muneshige's wife.

4th Special Duty: Pedro Valdés – Baseball team. Flores's older brother.

5th Special Duty: Flores Valdés – Baseball team. Pedro's younger sister.

“That should sum it up.”

Aoi suddenly raised his hand and pointed at the center of the list.

“What are these Testamenta Arma things on the list?”

What were the Testamenta Arma?

Naruze was the one to answer his question. She pointed at Horizon.

“They are divine weapons that were once distributed to the countries which possessed a Testament because they were meant to protect the Testaments. They used each country's Testament as a fuel source, so they could only be used above the ley lines in that country's territory. Even so, they could be used continuously to a certain extent. They were likely used as a model for producing Horizon's Logismo Oplo.”

“You know a lot about this, Naruze-sama. I have determined you are doing quite well.”

“I suppose,” said Naruze. She smiled bitterly when she looked at Naito sleeping while leaning against her, but she quickly began speaking once more. “There are seven different types of Testamenta Arma because they were modeled after the seven cardinal virtues that correspond to the seven deadly sins. However, there are two Testaments, the Novum and the Vetus, so there are a total of 14 in all. And the seven sets of Testaments each have one of the seven cardinal virtues. So...”

She drew on a sign frame with a pen to display the Testaments’ corresponding cardinal virtue and the nation that possessed them.

1st Testament: Fides (Faith) – K.P.A. Italia

2nd Testament: Spes (Hope) – Sviet Russia

3rd Testament: Caritas (Charity) – M.H.R.R.

4th Testament: Prudentia (Prudence) – Hexagone Française

5th Testament: Justitia (Justice) – England

6th Testament: Fortitudo (Fortitude) – P.A.ODA

7th Testament: Temperantia (Temperance) – Tres España

“These countries all possess the Testamenta Arma corresponding to their cardinal virtue. Before the Logismoï Oplo were made, these Testamenta Arma formed the power balance between nations. However, the non-Testament countries gained power through economic means and the history recreation, and the Testamenta Arma were difficult to use even as defense when faced with a member of the Testament Alliance because those weapons used the Testament as a fuel source. Overall, they were difficult to handle. However...”

Neshinbara took over here.

He spoke while continuing his own work on his sign frame.

“Then the Logismo Oplo appeared which could replenish their fuel and could therefore be brought outside the country. This drastically increased the power of Testament countries. And now Musashi has showed up to take those back,” he said. “While inside Testament countries, they will likely bring out their Testamenta Arma to prove that their fight is just. Those weapons are difficult to use while Musashi is travelling along the national borders, but our enemies can use them as much as they want within their borders. We need to be careful.”

“I see,” said not just Aoi but everyone.

Masazumi nodded and lightly pointed back at her sign frame.

“Okay. Tres España’s chancellor, Felipe II, inherited the Netherlands from Carlos I when he was designated chancellor. However, due to being overworked with managing Tres España and not understanding the foreign language, his management of the Netherlands has been sloppy. There have even been revolts and independence movements in response to the exploitation of the bureaucracy in charge. Holland’s war of independence against España is known as the Eighty Years’ War.”

Naito reacted to those words while fighting back a weary yawn. She blinked her eyes and nodded a few times.

“Right, right. That’s near my hometown, so I know about it. That war of independence is still ongoing, right?”

“Yes. Do you remember what I said while confronting the Papa-Schola? The Peace of Westphalia includes the resolution of the various wars and Holland’s independence. In other words, when we go to Westphalia and begin the conference, Tres España will lose Holland. And...”

“Heh heh heh. Enough insinuations. How about just getting to the point?”

“Judge,” said Masazumi with a nod. “Holland’s independence is supported by England which is fighting Tres España. Holland and England are both protestant and England has been stealing Tres España’s wealth by obstructing their trade with the New World using privateers. Holland still has no clear military might,

but they are expanding their reach via trade. While England and Tres España fight over them, we show up holding the key to the Peace of Westphalia and therefore Holland's independence. Things have remained calm so far, but they will grow much busier soon. After all..."

At that point, Neshinbara unexpectedly spoke up once more while continuing his own work.

"After all, England and Tres España are preparing for the Naval Battle of the Armada." He took a breath. "England will win this battle and it is said to begin soon. Musashi's arrival in England is sure to be used as an opportunity."

"Armada...?" asked Suzu who wore a track suit.

She tilted her head in confusion and Neshinbara continued speaking without turning around.

"That naval battle is said to settle things between Elizabeth of England and Felipe II of Tres España. Tres España constructs a new fleet and begins a landing operation against England. Both sides send out over 100 ships. It begins in complete confusion, but Tres España begins withdrawing counter-clockwise around England. England wins the battle, but with the 'interpretations' allowed in the history recreation, I doubt Tres España will accept defeat so easily.

"It is being said that Tres España will most likely put on an act of being thrown into confusion and then retreat so as to prevent any damage to their fleet. They will then carry out a landing operation on England to show the other countries they have the ability to invade. That way, they will come out essentially victorious despite 'losing' the battle. On the other hand, England is still a weak nation and they have not put together a proper fleet. I have heard they are planning to use the pirate privateers to strengthen their fleet."

So...

“With the Naval Battle of the Armada so soon, we should find opportunities to negotiate if we go to England. After all, Musashi holds high potential for trade. An offer of replenishing their goods can be used as an effective bargaining chip.”

Neshinbara gave Masazumi a look that said, “Isn’t that right?”

“You have to see a way we can take advantage of this situation, Honda Masazumi-kun.”

Masazumi had a single answer to that. She gave a deep nod and spoke.

“I would like to stay out of the Naval Battle of the Armada if at all possible.”

“As you can see, Musashi is currently in a dangerous situation,” said Masazumi as she tapped at the sign frame displaying a map of England and Shimonoseki.

“A lot is still unknown, so I cannot say anything for sure. However, we will soon be deciding what we do next, and that includes our negotiations with England. And so...”

Masazumi glanced over at Aoi.

...If only he was a bit more level-headed.

She had thought the same thing earlier.

Musashi had announced it would resolve the Apocalypse, but it had not yet made it clear how it would deal with the other countries.

...We have an objective, but we have not set a clear policy as to what methods we will use.

What relationship should they build with what countries? Would they make an enemy of some or all of them? Or would they ally with them? Would the basis of who was an enemy and who was an ally fall to who had the Testament and who did not?

Together, they would surely be able to present the elements needed to make all these decisions. However...

It will be that idiot making the decision. And if he does not make a decision, we will not be able to unify our thoughts on this, thought Masazumi. And most likely, the other countries will not understand unless he does.

She was aware of how drastic a thing they had done at Mikawa.

After all, she had been the one to initially create that path. And so if things did not go as that idiot wanted as he walked down that path, it would mean her path had been too vague.

So...

“Well, there is a lot I want to say, but we can make those decisions in England,” said Masazumi. “We need to understand our relationships with the other countries, we need to know what those countries are doing at the moment, and we need to understand why they are taking those actions. Also, we need to determine what we should do and we need to determine how we can do it.

“Due to England’s relationship with Izumo and the fact that they did not directly take part in the Harmonic Unification War, we can at least talk with them, even if we are not on friendly terms. That is why we are on our way to England. We must learn what we can and then make our decision. Do you understand?”

“Judge,” replied some. Others nodded.

Masazumi and Mitotsudaira then turned to Oriotorai and Oriotorai smiled and nodded.

“Judge. Well done. Thanks. To be honest, I get the feeling I never need to teach another class.”

“Heh heh heh. Sensei, I do not recall you ever teaching many classes.”

“C’mon now,” said Oriotorai with a smile instead of giving a proper response.

She then clapped her hands together to clear the atmosphere.

“Okay. We’ll end class here. This had a lot packed into it, so you should read back over everything if you recorded it. We should be getting involved with England, Tres España, and Holland soon. And with that...”

Just as she spoke, they heard a bell ring. That bell indicated the end of first period. Oriotorai continued speaking with the bell ringing in the background.

“Let’s get back to the classroom. Second period is Modern Japanese. Ohiroshiki will be giving the lecture and...let’s see, a few of the academy officers will be on lookout while the AM course marker is being dealt with, right?”

“Judge,” replied Mitotsudaira and Tenzou. Naito raised her hand.

Mitotsudaira then turned toward Masazumi.

“I will be on lookout from Shinagawa, so how about we walk together part of the way?”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi before having a sudden thought.

...Am I fitting into this class a bit now?

●Full Musashi Diagram●



Sis! Sis! What is Musashi's general shape like!? I asked "Musashi", but I only got a nerdy response that I didn't understand!



Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, that is a surprisingly good question for someone who doesn't look nerdy at all yet is obsessed with porn games. It looks like this when viewed from above. I will explain the details individually if I ever get a chance, but it is made up of two ships in the center and three on both the left and right. All of the ships are connected with towing belts, rope passageways, and transport pipes. Also, transport ships are always wandering between and around the ships. The ships directly in front of or behind the other overlap quite a bit and are very close together, but don't worry because they move away during turns.



Sis! Sis! What are those grid-like patterns on the decks!? Are they spell missile launchers!? ♪Mi-mi-missile la-la-la-la-launcher!



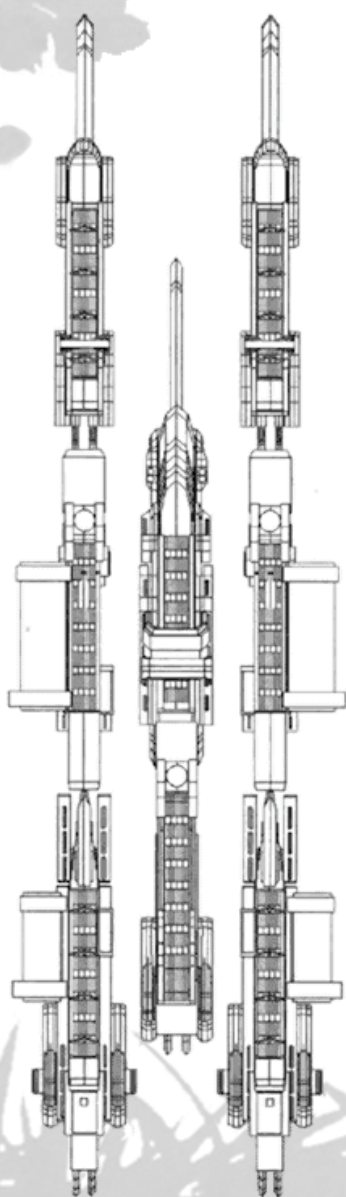
Foolish brother, it takes courage to not say anything when you find it boring. Anyway, the grid-like patterns running front and back along the center of the ships are the divisions of the different sectors on the surface. Can you see the lines of wide blocks and long blocks? Musashi Ariadust Academy covers the entire back of the central rear ship, Tama, from port to starboard.



Wait, wait, wait. Aren't we being pushed way back there? We're like chickens on a poultry farm.



You may be the rooster, but do you want your breast to be cooked up and eaten?



Study:

Full Musashi Diagram

Toori: Nee-chan! Nee-chan! What is Musashi's general shape like!? I asked "Musashi", but I only got a nerdy response that I didn't understand!

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, that is a surprisingly good question for someone who doesn't look nerdy at all yet is obsessed with porn games. It looks like this when viewed from above. I will explain the details individually if I ever get a chance, but it is made up of two ships in the center and three on both the left and right. All of the ships are connected with towing belts, rope passageways, and transport pipes. Also, transport ships are always wandering between and around the ships. The ships directly in front of or behind the other overlap quite a bit and are very close together, but don't worry because they move away during turns.

Toori: Nee-chan! Nee-chan! What are those grid-like patterns on the decks!? Are they spell missile launchers!? ♪Mi-mi-missile la-la-la-la-la-launcher!

Kimi: "Foolish brother, it takes courage to not say anything when you find it boring. Anyway, the grid-like patterns running front and back along the center of the ships are the divisions of the different sectors on the surface. Can you see the lines of wide blocks and long blocks? Musashi Ariadust Academy covers the entire back of the central rear ship, Tama, from port to starboard.

Toori: Wait, wait, wait. Aren't we being pushed way back there? We're like chickens on a poultry farm.

Kimi: You may be the rooster, but do you want your breast to be cooked up and eaten?

Chapter 1: Members of the Vermilion Field

CHAPTER 1

"Members of the Vermilion Field"



When accepting a test
That you desired
Are your reason and your intention the same?
Point Allocation (Challenge)

When accepting a test

That you desired

Are your reason and your intention the same?

Point Distribution (Challenge)

The ceiling was round.

It was a broad, white ceiling made of stone.

The walls supporting it had colorful patterns of glass embedded in them which allowed the midday sunlight in. Below the ceiling was a level floor with a red line running down the center.

It was a great hall. The red line of a carpet ran across a floor of white stone.

A single figure stood in the center of that red carpet that bisected the round hall.

It was a girl. She wore a vermilion uniform and sat with her legs underneath her. She did not have human arms from the shoulder on. Instead, she had giant metal arms. They occasionally made small noises as she placed her fists on the carpet as if to support herself.

At the end of the carpet both in front of and behind the girl were passageways and large double doors. The door behind her was made of black wood and the one in front of her was decorated in gold.

The girl stared at the floor with her head hanging down.

She moved slightly.

She had heard a noise. The door behind her had opened slightly and she had heard footsteps entering the hall.

She turned around and saw a man who looked like a businessman. He had a mop and wooden bucket in his hands.

“Chancellor?”

The man was past middle-age, wore glasses, and had removed his worn-out jacket. He gave a small nod when he noticed the girl. He proceeded to soak the mop in the bucket, wring it, and mop the edge of the hall as if he were drawing a semicircle.

The girl followed him with her gaze until he reached the door in front of her.

That decorated door suddenly opened inward. At the same time, a female student acting as a lady-in-waiting spoke up.

“Vice president and treasurer of Alcalá de Henares’s student council, Lady Juana, has arrived!”

The door opened without a single creak. The only sound was the movement of air. Someone walked out into the center of the hall through that door.

This person was a woman who nodded in thanks to the girls who opened the double door from either side and then passed through. She was tall and wore a vermilion uniform. Her name was Juana and the guard-covered ears that proved she was of the long-lived race shook a bit as she walked. She walked with long strides that made her black hair flow behind her and the sharp eyes behind her black glasses looked toward the girl on the floor.

“Tachibana Gin,” said Juana after stopping a few steps in front of her. “You understand why you were called here as soon as you returned from Mikawa, do you not?”

“Testament,” replied Gin while still hanging her head down.

Juana immediately said, “Alcalá de Henares’s officers and student council have decided to revoke one inherited name of the 1st special duty officer who has

inherited the name Garcia de Ceballos and Tachibana Muneshige. The latter shall be revoked.”

In other words...

“The name Tachibana Muneshige shall be given to another qualified student.”

Gin remained silent and continued staring at the floor as she listened to Juana.

She thought of him as he still slept while healing from that battle about two weeks ago. When they had arrived at A.H.’s land port, his entire bed had been immediately transported to the medical institution. However...

...Muneshige-sama will...

He would no longer be Muneshige. The reason for that was obvious.

He held the name of the warrior known as the Peerless in the West, yet he had lost and his Logismo Oplo had been taken.

They of course had their responsibility as a major Testament Union nation which possessed a Testament, but Tres España also supported its economy with investments from other countries. Anything that made them look weak would make others hesitant to invest. By stripping Muneshige of his inherited name and giving it to someone else, they were saying this had been Muneshige’s mistake and not theirs.

The man who had been her husband would become a stranger and someone else would take that position.

Meanwhile, a noise came from Juana in front of Gin. Juana had pulled a document case from beneath her skirt. She pulled out a few documents and charms with the corners lined up.

“As you can see, the paperwork is in order.”

“Vice president,” called Gin.

“What is it?” responded Juana.

Juana’s tone said to stop, but Gin did not hesitate to speak.

“I would like permission to head out to the front line.”

“Why?”

“Testament. Because we must obtain victory over Musashi Ariadust Academy.”

“Why must we?”

“Tes,” said Gin with a nod. When she opened her mouth, she spoke what had been on her mind during the two weeks in Mikawa and the voyage here. “Tres España was repelled by the Far East. We must show the world that was a mistake.”

“That does not require you to fight, does it?”

“I see you do not deny we will attack Musashi. Do the officers and student council see something in Musashi regarding the approaching battle against England?”

Once she finished speaking, Gin listened. She heard Juana send a small laugh to the floor.

And so Gin continued speaking.

“I would like permission to join the ranks of those taking revenge on Musashi and reclaiming the Logismo Oplo.”

“But you are weaker than Tachibana Muneshige, are you not?”

“Testament,” immediately replied Gin. She took in a breath. “If I am able to defeat Musashi Ariadust Academy, it will prove that it was ‘some kind of

mistake' that the 1st special duty officer who is stronger than me lost. I will head out and win. That will repay the debt incurred by Tres España."

Her two weeks' worth of thought was initially met with silence from Juana. But finally, Gin heard the woman adjust her position a bit.

"In that case..."

As soon as Juana began to speak, a sudden noise came from behind Gin.

A sharp sound came from the large door as if it was being split open.

However, this noise was not that of the door being opened. It was...

...A rapping noise. And those appear when...

Gin sensed four people approaching from behind her. She turned around to look at them.

"Hey there! Vice Chancellor, captain of the baseball team, inherited names Hironaka Takakane and Alonso Pére...Pé...Pé...Pé..."

"It's Pérez de Guzmán, Taka-san. Oh, and 2nd special duty officer, track-and-field captain, inherited names Era Fusahide and Álvaro de Bazán here with some urgent news."

Two of them spoke first. One was a short man and the other a woman a head taller.

The man's uniform had been modified for baseball, his skin was nicely tanned, his body had a firm build, he wore a brimmed helmet, and he carried a sports bag and a cylindrical leather case taller than he was.

The tall woman was of the long-lived race, she wore a track suit, and she held a light board.

And there was one point in common between the two of them.

Their feet grew blurry and then invisible.

...*Spirits*.

Following behind those two was a boy and girl. The girl was younger and she waved her hand.

“Hiii! The navy pitcher of the baseball team, Flores Valdés of the Bungo Navy, is here! I see the floor is nice and clean!”

The boy with long blond hair standing next to her gave a deep nod.

“Sister, I am glad you have so much energy, but I cannot approve of coming so dangerously close to a pun such as saying ‘floor is’ so soon after your name. You need to find a better way of showing off how cute you are.”

“Okay, I get it, so how about you die, brother? Oh, my brother Pedro Valdés is here too, as you can see.”

“Testament,” said Juana with a nod.

The four walked in, but their gazes stopped on Gin.

“Oh, would you look at that. It’s the Tachibana wife. You made it back. So, let’s see... Miss Juana’s here, but old man Vela isn’t.”

The door in front of Gin cracked open and a long-lived man’s face poked out. He was a lean man with a mustache and paint on his cheek. He frowned and turned toward Takakane.

“Don’t underestimate the secretary, dammit. Diego Velázquez is here, so don’t act like I’m not. I’m just busy creating my new work.”

“You shouldn’t be making and selling porn games at your age.”

“Don’t be stupid. There’s a lot you only understand once you’re old. Like how many enjoyable things there are in this world.”

“Oh? For once, I agree with you. The Tres Español way to live is to use the money you have, give in to your passions, have a party, and forget everything unpleasant.”

The two men exchanged toothy grins and nods before Fusahide elbowed Takakane.

After a wave from a paintbrush-holding hand, the door closed and Takakane glanced around.

“That just leaves Muneshige...”

As he trailed off, Fusahide elbowed Takakane in the side again. He glanced over at Gin, lowered his eyebrows and brought his hands together.

“Y-yeah... It’s, um, too bad about Muneshige. It’s a real shame. Uh, what am I supposed to say at a time like this? Oh, should I say ‘namu’?”

“Taka-san that means he’s dead. Also, we’re Catholic, so you don’t have to bring your hands together.”

“Shut up, Fusae,” said Takakane.



Diego Velázquez

Juana

Felipe Segundo

Hironaka Takakane

Era Fusae

Pedro Valdés

Flores Valdés

Tachibana Gin

Fusae gave a bitter smile and Juana asked her a question.

“Now then. You said you had news. What is it?”

“We have some bad news and some not so good news. Which do you want first?”

“2nd special duty officer, you tell me instead.”

“Chehh,” pouted Takakane as Fusae looked down at the papers held in her light board.

“First, P.A.ODA has finished its attack on Asai. With this adjustment within their territory, it is thought their external activities will grow more intense from now on.”

“If P.A.ODA has secured a foothold, the neighboring Qing-Takeda should be under a lot more tension. Not to mention Hexagone Française who also have M.H.R.R. in Hashiba to worry about,” said Juana.

Gin nodded.

“During our return, the Papa-Schola said Musashi is a ‘going’ threat and P.A.ODA is a ‘coming’ threat.”

“He was telling us to be careful, but also admonishing himself. K.P.A. Italia borders M.H.R.R. just like Hexagone Française. And as a Catholic nation, we are not completely unconnected to K.P.A. Italia.”

“And the other news?” asked Juana.

“Testament. It seems Musashi has been detected in the sky to the west. They have likely lessened their stealth mode in preparation to place the course marker. Most likely, they are performing the marker check so the Testament Union can’t take advantage of it and remaining in stealth mode except when at port. That seems to be why they have been moving so slowly.”

Gin lightly clenched her back teeth when she heard the word “Musashi”. Juana nodded and took a breath.

“We need to contact the chancellor and student council president.”

“Tes,” replied everyone else, but Juana frowned.

“But where has he gotten? I have not seen him for a while.”

“Eh?”

Gin, Takakane, Fusae, and the Valdés siblings pointed behind Juana.

As Juana turned around, Gin could see a middle-aged man in worn-out clothes mopping the passageway beyond the large ornamented door.

A few seconds after Juana saw the man bending over and polishing the floor, her ears stood up.

“Wh-what are you doing!?”

“...Eh!? Wh-what?”

The glasses-wearing, middle-aged man turned around in the passageway as if embracing the mop.

Juana quickly and loudly walked over with long strides.

“What do you think you are doing!? Tres España is in a crisis and you are the chancellor, the student council president, and Felipe Segundo!”

“Y-yeah, but you seemed to be handling all the work pretty well, Juana-kun. This is really all I can do...”

“That is not the issue there! Listen...”

As a lecture began echoing down the passageway, Gin turned toward Takakane and Fusae.

Takakane was watching the middle-aged chancellor obediently respond to the lecture.

“She’s always so strict when it comes to him.”

“I know,” agreed Fusae who was a head taller than Takakane.

That is the opposite of Muneshige-sama and me, thought Gin as she watched them.

When she stood up and turned around, Fusae spoke to her.

“What will you do, Gin-chan? You want to head out and fight, don’t you? When you do, we should be pretty helpful as the leader on land and the leader on sea.”

Gin used a single word to respond. She nodded and returned the woman’s gaze just as she heard Juana’s voice continue the lecture.

“You need to pull yourself together! Honestly!”

Chapter 02: Uninvited Guest in the Classroom

CHAPTER 2

"Uninvited Guest in the Classroom"



When you look into the sky
And when you look ahead
What is it you still cannot see?
Point Allocation (Alone)

When you look into the sky

And when you look ahead

What is it you still cannot see?

Point Distribution (Alone)

A certain wooden room was lined with desks. Young faces sat in the seats.

This was a classroom.

The sunlight shone in through the window and lit up the classroom's side wall. Charcoal sketches of a ship hung on the wall, one for each of the students.

The sketches of an aerial ship made up of eight individual ships had labels attached below each one that gave a title and explanation. They all had the title "Field Trip – Musashi as Visible from a Transport Ship". Some of them even wrote "Musashi" in kanji.

The students in the classroom were facing forward. Someone was giving a lesson with a textbook in hand while standing in front of the blackboard. It was Masazumi who was still wearing her track suit.

Masazumi stretched her arm out to the side so the blackboard was visible while she wrote with a piece of chalk.

"Are you listening? What this means is that bread does not simply come from the bakery. The wheat it is made from is grown in a field, the flour is made at a mill..." She wrote field and flower mill and drew an arrow connecting them. "...the dough is made at a bread factory, the dough is baked in an oven, and it is finally brought to the bakery to be sold. Some bakeries have an oven of their own to bake the bread. Anyway, what matters is that there are five important jobs: the field, the flour mill, the bread factory, the oven, and the bakery. However, there is

one more job that goes into making bread,” said Masazumi. “Now, does anyone know what that is?”

As Masazumi asked her question, she thought to herself.

...Things have been busy lately, but the elementary school is still peaceful.

The answer to her question was transportation.

By saying Musashi performed a similar job for the other countries, she could segue into the state of those countries, the state of Musashi, and how they interacted.

...I wonder if I can make it as far as our trip to England. I doubt I can get into the Testament Union. Oh, but the paper box containing “Rapid Fire” is leaning against the wall outside. I need to take that home with me. Father really can order some troublesome things, but I am interested in this item because it’s so popular. Will I be able to set it up on my own?

“Masazumi-sensei, what is it?” asked a child on the front row.

Masazumi came back to her senses and nodded toward them.

“I’m fine. I was just thinking about how much I was looking forward to lunch.”

“Really?”

Everyone in the class, both boys and girls, lowered the ends of their eyebrows.

They tilted their heads and looked at her in confusion.

“Sensei, you had your pants pulled down while talking about some confusing things the other day. My mama called it ‘embarrassment play’, but did it traumatize you?”

“I sometimes see Masazumi-sensei just standing on the side of the road muttering to herself. Is she broken?”

“She’s also been seen collapsed on the side of the road a few times. Is it a Hidarugami or something?”

She had a feeling all of those were accurate, but for some reason she could not bear to agree with any of them.

“Enough of that,” said Masazumi while grateful that the children were worried about her. “Let’s get back to the other job needed to make bread. Do you all know what it is?”

She was asking them to make sure she had taught them properly, so she felt it was more a question to herself than anyone. And...

“Okay, all of you give me the answer. The other job is...”

They all raised their hands in unison.

“A slave!”

“Who taught you that!?”

The children all tilted their heads at her sudden outburst.

“The teacher who came while you were taking a break the other day.”

Masazumi let out a slight groan. Over the past few days when they had been travelling east over the ocean from northwest Kyushu, she had often had to remain in the student council room to deal with emergencies.

...So it was the substitute lecturer that taught them that odd answer. But if it was a real teacher, is that the right answer?

“Who was-...”

Before Masazumi could say “this other teacher”, the sliding door to her left suddenly opened and someone entered.

“Hi, everyone! Toori-sensei is here for class again! And I’m naked. Now, today’s presents are the extra clear file folders I have from buying so many limited edition porn games.”

In the very next instant, the living dead janitor cleaning the courtyard of the academy’s elementary school saw a naked boy burst through the hallway-side wall of the school building and fly away.

Masazumi left her roundhouse kick pose, folded her arms, and looked out into the hallway.

Eventually, Aoi returned from outside with his God Mosaic on and while pointing at her.

“Wait just a damn second, Seijun! The clear file folder from this Chinese porn game ‘Harem Lover! Kissing Chinese King!’ is rare, y’know!? What if you damaged it!?”

“Leave and don’t come back.”

“Huh? Has this game of catch turned into batting practice?”

Aoi tilted his head and Masazumi could only sigh.

...Why is he our student council president and chancellor?

The only reason she could think of was “personal virtue” and the politician side of her felt terribly and truly sorry for the rest of humanity that lived properly. At any rate...

“More importantly, did you walk all the way here naked?”

Not that it would be much better if he suddenly started stripping on the way, she thought as the idiot struck a pose in front of her.

“Oh, oh, Seijun? Are you that interested in my naked body?”

“I’m going to go with a metaphor so as not to hurt you too much: aren’t mosquitoes annoying when they’re flying around you?”

“Oh, and is this a really sexy mosquito!? Or does it have a happy trail!?”

What kind of mosquito is that? she thought while the naked mosquito acted flirtatiously in front of her. However...

“Eh?”

Aoi suddenly turned around. A black hand had appeared on his shoulder. Masazumi looked behind him as well and saw a silver-haired automaton standing there.

The automaton brought the index finger of her other hand in front of her nose and shook it back and forth.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk,” she said expressionlessly.

In the next moment, the teacher and students having gym class in the schoolyard of the academy’s elementary school saw a naked boy burst through the front wall of the school building and fly away.

“Um... Horizon?”

Horizon left her uppercut pose and Masazumi hesitantly spoke to her.

“Why are you here?”

“Judge. I thought I could use my abilities as an automaton to help with Toori-sama’s lesson, so I snuck along behind him. I then saw him strip naked in front of the school and seduce you while naked. Oh, but I only have 1/9 of my emotions, so I have no way of knowing when to be angry. That is why I used the ‘wrath manual’ Asama-sama and the others gave me. According to the manual, that was Italian style.”

Masazumi felt she should tsukkomi every last bit of that, but she was poor at ad-libbing. While Masazumi tried to figure out what to do, Horizon bowed toward her.

“And on another note, you were seduced by him.”

“Eh?” said Masazumi with a tilt of the head.

Horizon used gentle gravitational control to pull out the classroom’s sliding door and hid behind it with both hands holding it.

She stuck half her head out from behind the door and stared at Masazumi with a thin, trembling smile and the whites of her eyes visible on the bottom.

“Y-you thief! ...How was my artificial jealousy, Masazumi-sama?”

...Is this because I let her read that jealousy literature like the Tale of Genjina?

As Masazumi thought to herself, Aoi returned from outside.

He was smiling as if nothing had happened.

“Okay, it’s time for class!”

However, the children all reacted to his words. Most of them gave little shrieks, stood from their desks, and ran to the opposite corner of the classroom. Some of the boys formed a wall in front of Aoi.

“S-stay back! Stay back, Toori! We told you to never come back, you idiot!”

“That’s right! Idiot! Idiot! You’re stupider than us, so stay away! Do you want to lose your Kennikuman knight eraser again!?”

“C’mon, you kids aren’t very nice. Do I need to take a page out of Hondalia’s book and make an adult out of all of you, one by one?”

“Aoi, what have you been doing here while I was gone?”

“What? Teaching a class, obviously. ...Okay! Today’s class will be a kamishibai!!”

The children began booing.

“That’s not a class!”

“Oh, yes it is. You’re all so stupid you need a class on morals. I’m gonna tell you an old story that’s been passed down since the Age of the Gods. Ohhh, I’m so super nice!”

Aoi pulled a bundle of paper for the kamishibai from somewhere and set it up on the lectern.

“Okay, this time I’ll tell you the story of the Hanasaka Jijii.”

The way he said “this time” led Masazumi to assume he had done this for a class before. He was interfering with her class, but it was also dangerous to kick him out and leave him to his own devices. The children gave him suspicious looks, but they began returning to their seats when the situation did not look dangerous. A performer would leave when his performance was complete, so Masazumi decided to view this as a natural disaster and just let it pass.

Meanwhile, Aoi began reading the story written on the reverse side of the paper.

“Once upon a time...”

“A truly long time ago, an old man lived in a certain place.”

That's a pretty standard opening, thought Masazumi as she folded her arms and looked toward Horizon.

Horizon was looking with great interest toward Aoi rather than the kamishibai.

...Is curiosity different from an emotion?

Meanwhile, Aoi continued the story.

“The old man had lost his wife early, so he lived alone.

His older son had been arrested in a riot and burned alive.

His younger son had disappeared after becoming a member of a gonin gumi.

One day, the old man took in a puppy.

The old man named the dog Spot and used the dog to distract him from the loneliness of having no family.

However...”

...However, Spot was a talking dog and he told the old man where a treasure was as thanks for taking him in.

A mean old man next door learned of this and took Spot away, but Spot refused to tell the mean old man where the treasure was and the mean old man killed the dog. When the old man scattered Spot's ashes, flowers grew, the lord of that land noticed the old man, and he never had want of anything for the rest of his life. But when the mean old man tried to copy the action, no flowers grew. The lord of the land grew angry and executed the mean old man.

There were a few different variations, but it was a story about a clever servant telling apart the personalities of two similar-looking old men and rewarding or punishing them accordingly.

Aoi's story continued just as Masazumi remembered it.

“Spot was actually a talking dog and one day he said the following:

Old man, I have actually been hiding something.

As you can see, I can talk. I was only hiding it because I was not sure if you were an honest person.

However, I now know you are an honest person.

As thanks for taking me in and raising me as you have, I will tell you where a treasure is located.

However...”

However? Does the story really take a turn here? wondered Masazumi with a tilt of her head.

Aoi flipped to the next page.

“The old man could not stop his blood pressure from slowly rising.

The old man was actually part beast.

His beast power had been building up ever since his wife passed away and it was about to burst out.

Spot frantically tried to flee, but it was too late.

The old man was ready to launch.

He had approval.

Ahh, old man! What are you doing? I'll bite you! I'll bite you!

Heh heh heh. Quit acting like you're a little girl of fifteen.

Spot frantically cried out.

Ahh! Let go of me! Let go of me, old man! Let go, old man!

But his resistance was futile and the old man finally managed to spread Spot's legs.

He-... Wait, wait. Seijun, Horizon, why are you both putting a hand on my shoulders?"

In the next moment, the living dead janitor cleaning the courtyard of the academy elementary school saw...etc.

A certain figure stared up at the thick white fog that was actually the stealth barrier that cut off all information.

This figure was on the central rear ship named Okutama as Musashi flew through that space that resembled a white cocoon. Specifically, he sat on the wall of the academy at the top of the stepped structure at the stern of the ship.

The figure sitting perpendicular to the wall of the three-story wooden school building was a boy wearing a hat and a uniform modified to resemble a ninja outfit. His arm band read "1st Special Duty – Tenzou Crossunit". He pulled a handheld shrine from his pocket and used it to display two sign frames in the air. He spoke toward the left sign frame.

"How are things on the port side, Naito-dono?"

Naito appeared in the sign frame wearing her uniform and embracing her broom while standing on the front deck of Asakusa. She smiled toward Tenzou and spoke.

"Oh, yes, yes. Judge, judge. I just got to my position, but everything still looks white. We're getting close to the marker we need to send our course to, but it takes about five minutes to exit stealth mode. We should be about there, but I guess even 'Musashi' and the others have a hard time seeing what's outside through the stealth barrier."

Tenzou went on to display someone else in the right sign frame. This person had silver hair.

“Um, this is Mitotsudaira. Did you hear an odd noise from the direction of Tama? It happened three times. Masazumi should be there for her part-time job, so I am a bit worried.”

“Hm, the chancellor and Horizon went to Tama as well, so it should be fine,” said Naito.

“That makes we all the more worried...”

“True.”

Naito and Mitotsudaira averted their gazes and hung their heads, but they quickly recovered.

“Is Naruze not with you? According to the shift chart...”

“Oh, she’s stuck with indoor work because Weiss Fräulein still isn’t fixed. Are we still together on the shift chart? She’s probably in class with everyone else while drawing her new doujinshi ‘Get Lost, Emperor Nero’.”

“I’m not sure about that title...but sorry. I should have been more considerate.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Even if we can only manage half the work, we had some money saved up. Ga-chan tends to turn her back to the wall at night if she’s trying to be considerate, but she hasn’t been doing that. ...Anyway, what about Masa-yan? She said she was taking off starting second period regardless of her shift.”

“Judge. From what I heard, she dragged the god of war team off to work on repairing the broken derrick. On my way here, a few of the freight blocks had been turned into areas to store the parts for the derrick.”

This is a completely normal conversation, thought Tenzou as he listened to the girls.

The officers had had a lot of work recently and his time with Toori and the others had increased a lot, so he had not experienced many serious conversations like that.

He liked hearing this discussion between friends where they were considerate of each other. The conversation did not immediately turn to money, history, or porn games and this was not a gruesome conversation of the demon world filled with evil laughs and cruel exchanges of sarcasm.

He decided to ignore the fact that this conversation was between a member of a lesbian couple and a knight with superhuman strength. But at the same time...

...It's hard to join into a conversation between girls.

He felt he was getting too worked up over people he had known since elementary school, but they were also no longer that young.

In the past, they had clashed over what countries or regions they were from and over racial differences. The conflicts with Mitotsudaira had been especially physical in nature. However, they had all stopped that at around middle school when they began to understand the circumstances concerning their original countries and Musashi.

...We knew where our own position was.

Our own position. Tenzou thought on that phrase. He thought about what his position was among them all.

...Hm. Toori-dono recently installed me as 'minister of buying drinks in less than three minutes'.

"That isn't it at all!" he cried out.

"Wh-what is it?"

Tenzou turned to the window next to him. A girl was sticking her head from the window of the reference room which neighbored the student council room.

“Oh, Suzu-dono. What are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be in class?”

“Oh, y-yes. Sensei is, um, ‘executing’ Ohiroshiki-kun, so, uh, she told me to bring a horse enema. Everyone is, um, holding him down. Can’t you hear him screaming?”

“I see. But what is something like that doing in the reference room?”

“And isn’t it the 1st special duty officer’s job to retrieve something like that?” cut in Mitotsudaira.

“Yeah, I think it is,” added Naito.

...In three minutes!? Is that what you’re saying!?

Suzu smiled toward him.

“Oh, d-don’t worry. I already have it, so I just have to go back. See?”

“You don’t need to hold it out here. By the way, I didn’t realize you knew so much about the reference room, Suzu-dono.”

“Yes. ...As a member of the lifestyle committee, I c-clean and organize it. There are a lot of things I can t-touch, like that big 3D map of the Far East that the student council and the officers u-use. There is also a world map like it and... Ah.” Suzu suddenly looked from left to right. “I-I just heard an e-explosion from Tama.”

“Yes, Toori-dono, Horizon-dono, and Masazumi-dono are there together.”

“...I-I wonder if they’re having f-fun.”

“It’s hard to say,” said Tenzou as he imagined Toori’s current situation. “I’ve never had a girlfriend, after all.”

“S-sorry... I-I shouldn’t have asked.”

“No, it’s my fault for bringing it up.”

“What kind of girl do you like, 1st special duty officer?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Well-endowed blondes.”

“As one of those, I have to tell you that that’s your problem,” commented Naito.

“Yes. As a shrine maiden who serves a god, I think that might be a problem too.”

“Heh heh heh. I see this ninja prefers flashy things to sneaking around. How about you marry a blonde cow? Let’s Holstein!”

“C’mon, everyone. Stop eavesdropping in the middle of class and focus on the execution. Do you want me mad at *you* too?”

“Wh-why are all of you listening in!?” shouted Tenzou.

The unneeded sign frames vanished and Tenzou sighed. He sat cross-legged and rested his chin in his hands.

“This would be a lot easier if I could get a girlfriend just by wanting one...”

“I-I hope you find a nice person,” said Suzu with a parting nod. “T-Toori-kun has been working hard since he found Horizon again, so y-you might be able to work even harder i-if you find someone like that.”

“Maybe so.”

He had never found anyone like that, so he could not say. And if he did find someone...

...Will I be willing to take over the world like Toori-dono?

“See you later,” Tenzou said to Suzu before sighing again.

As he did, a new sign frame opened in front of him. It was an incoming call and it showed an automaton in a maid uniform.

“This is ‘Musashi’. I truly apologize for the wait. I have been able to check our external location, so we will now be moving in to complete the course marker work. Over.”

Tenzou fixed his posture as “Musashi” spoke. He then replied to her.

“This is a little later than planned. Is locating the course marker that difficult?”

“Judge. It is not that even automatons have difficulty detecting the situation outside the stealth barrier. To be honest, automatons have an even harder time detecting the situation outside the stealth barrier. Over.”

“Really?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Judge,” replied “Musashi”. “The standard procedure for determining the situation outside the stealth barrier is to thin a portion of the barrier and gather information through there. When a hole is opened in that manner, I use the external parabolic microphones and other devices on the different ships to gather and comprehend the massive amount of data within a radius of approximately ten kilometers. However...”

“However?”

“An automaton works evenly. When faced with such a massive amount of data, I cannot determine what it means or what parts are important until I have evenly examined all of it. In other words, I cannot say ‘that’s it!’ and isolate an important-sounding noise without inspecting everything. Automata are excellent when precise work is needed over a long period of time. We take action after comprehending everything. But...

“Sorry if I’m butting in,” said Naito. “But that would make things difficult during battle. Instead of just focusing on the enemy’s movements, you would have to equally examine the sounds of the waves and people’s voices before making a decision.”

“Judge. This situation is the same. The marker work is possible through the stealth barrier, but this method would require that we nearly come to a complete stop before the receiver’s location can be determined with enough certainty. Over.”

Tenzou understood what that meant.

Musashi was as large and massive as a city, so it took time to pick up speed when stopped.

Stopping this close to Tres España was very dangerous for Musashi. After all, setting the marker would give away their current position. Even if the stealth information barrier prevented them from being detected, it could not stop shells. If the marker point was surrounded and they were fired on from all sides while they were trying to get up to speed, it would all be over for them.

So...

“While moving, stealth mode is temporarily removed. Once the marker has been set, stealth mode is resumed and we leave the airspace. However, the evenness of my observation may slow my detection of a change outside while releasing stealth mode or changing our course. That is why I am having you assist me using your perception. Over.”

“My nose is better than my eyes. Are you sure you want me helping?”

...In that case, how can Mitotsudaira-dono stand to buy those natto products?

It was possible she just really liked the smell of natto, but he was afraid mentioning it would end in him being wrapped in wara natto and set on fire.

Tenzou nodded to himself as he sat alone on the wall and the sky began to gain color.

Starting from the front of the stealth barrier, the white sky split apart to reveal the color blue.

As the blue midday sky grew visible, it looked less like ripping and more like a white shell was being peeled away.

“_____”

The blue of the heavens quickly spread out.

“That is the ocean. From the looks of things, there is nothing else around,” muttered Mitotsudaira in relief.

Naito looked around within the sign frame.

“Yeah, I can see England’s island to the east, but I can’t see anything in the direction of Honshu. I thought I might catch a glimpse of the invincible armada.”

“Judge. Thank you very much. ‘Musashino’ is currently handling the marker work.”

A red light shot from the bottom of Musashino’s bow and toward the ocean surface.

This sent their course position to the buoy-shaped point receiver placed on the ocean.

As Suzu walked through the hallway, she heard the change to the sky outside the window.

The external sounds which had been blocked by the stealth barrier suddenly washed over her.

...I used to think this was scary.

She had grown used to it halfway through elementary school. Her friends had brought her to the bow of the ship, the outer edge of the ship, and other places. There, she had learned what existed outside Musashi and what it all meant.

Having the sounds from outside the stealth barrier reach her meant her ears were sensing the situation as far as a few kilometers away. Even if she could not see, she had a “field” in which she could sense things similar to other people’s fields of vision.

While Musashi had spent a year travelling throughout the Far East, Suzu had used the 3D maps in the reference room and the different sounds outside to learn how to predict the weather and distinguish between different geographical areas.

What she heard now was the western side of the Far East. She heard sounds of the sky above the ocean.

The waves were rough and the wind blew sublimely.

As if earplugs had been pulled out, she could now hear the outside world. It pressed in against her.

“Eh?”

She heard something odd. It began as a strange reverberation and developed into a sound she had never before heard in this sky but that she remembered hearing recently. That sound was...

“Tres Españan...ships?”

Mitotsudaira noticed it first.

As she stood on the front edge of Shinagawa, she noticed a scent mixed in with the saltiness of the ocean.

“Industrial oil?”

This was not cooking oil. It resembled the smell always on Naomasa’s clothes. However, it was still different from the oil she had smelled on Naomasa and the others. It was slightly bitter.

...Is this...?

They were in the air above the ocean. There was nothing around, but it would take time for this scent to spread. Since it had not dispersed within the sea breeze, the source of the smell had to be stopped nearby.

“Stay alert!!” she shouted as her eyebrows shot up.

At the same moment, several shadows appeared in the sky.

Two large ships and six small ones appeared directly overhead as if ripping apart the sky.

“It’s a Tres Españan attack fleet! Two Kraken-class ships! Six Wyvern-class ships! They are approximately 500 meters above us! They are exiting stealth mode!!”

In response to Mitotsudaira’s cry, two sign frames appeared next to her face. One was from “Musashi” and the other from Neshinbara.

Neshinbara raised his eyebrows while participating in the execution with the others.

“Damn, and when we had finally managed to hold him down. ... Oh, forget about it. Mitotsudaira-kun, were they really using stealth? Not even the Far East has implemented stealth barriers small enough for Wyvern-class ships.”

“Judge, I saw it with my own eyes. ... ‘Musashi’, what is the situation?”

“Judge, the enemy ships are currently descending. There is a difference in speed, so I estimate the Tres Españan ships will descend on the second left ship, the second right ship, and the back of the front central ship. I estimate they will complete their descent in three minutes and 20 seconds. Over.”

“Judge,” replied Mitotsudaira with a nod. She reattached the chain-supplying obelisks she always carried behind her shoulders.

Meanwhile, warning bells began ringing and hatches leading underground could be heard closing.

Approximately three minutes. As Mitotsudaira thought on that time limit, she turned toward the rear ships.

...Further back than the second ship is a bit far.

“ ‘Musashi’! Please determine where the battlefield will be!”

As she spoke, a simple torii-shaped sign frame appeared next to her face. The wide screen displayed Musashi’s path and the path of the eight enemy ships descending from above.

“Judge. One of the Kraken-class ships and two of the Wyvern-class ships will be unable to descend upon us given their position. I will stow the transport pipes between ships while using defensive gravity barriers to deflect three of the Wyvern-class ships’ descents. I predict we will receive a bombardment from the side, but...”

The estimated descent points were displayed with red circles on the sign frame. The primary battlefield indicated in red was on the back half of Musashi.

“This is ‘Musashino’. Tres España has begun bombing and bombarding us!”

A new sign frame labeled with the name “Musashino” appeared. It displayed an automaton with semi-long hair.

At the same time, the sky lit up.

The descending fleet sent spellfire down from the port and starboard simultaneously. The gravity barriers emitted light as they stopped that barrage. Smoke, the flashes of hits, and the fragments of light from destroyed barriers filled the air above Musashi’s second ships like a glowing mist.

However, it was all swept backwards as the ship continued to move forward.

Mitotsudaira then heard “Musashi” speak.

“I predict the primary battlefield will be in the air above Okutama. I will be making some preparations, so please for a moment. Over.”

“How about you tell us to do something other than wait around?”

As she watched the second bombing and more surging light, Mitotsudaira began to run.

“Tell us to win.”

A ship that looked like a city divided into eight segments was visible down below.

As that giant shadow moved forward as if breaking through several walls made up of glowing mist, the commanding Tres Españan ship looked down from above.

“Command will now be taken by Era Fusahide, 2nd special duty officer of Tres España, member of the western defense fleet’s emergency attack unit, and double inheritor of the name Álvaro de Bazán.”

A giant *cadena firma* in the center of the low-ceilinged bridge displayed the scene below the ship. A woman in a vermillion track suit stood in front of it. She held a light handheld church shaped like a light board in her left hand and used the stylus pen in her right hand to give course instructions on the 3D fleet diagram displayed by the handheld church. And...

“Taka-san, the ship with the baseball team’s first years, second years, and the Valdés siblings is off course. I’ll guide them to the portside of Musashi, so watch the air currents and instruct them to begin their bombardment.”

In response, a *cadena firma* made up of crosses appeared next to the light board. Takakane’s helmeted head was visible inside with the flashes of impacts and sounds of attacks in the background. He adjusted the position of the helmet which

had a T for Tres España on it and he spoke loud enough to be heard over the sounds of the bombing.

“Fusae, can’t we use any bursting rounds or spell rounds for this bombing!? Normal rounds aren’t enough to get through the concentrated gravity barriers. According to the records Tachibana brought back, those things can even repel an ether cannon. We can’t descend like this!”

“The pressure of the blasts could throw the air currents into disarray, and that would be dangerous. Your baseball team may be used to fighting that roughly because you’re primarily a land unit, but my track-and-field team is an aerial descent unit that does things a little more smartly.”

“Then are you saying we can make it down if we do it ‘smartly’ or whatever you called it? As an expert at attacking fortresses, let me tell you one thing: this isn’t a good situation. If you think of Musashi as a fortress, this is way too few people to take it.”

“I know,” said Fusae with a smile. The vibrations of the explosions coming through the floor caused her hair to shake. “Testament. You were fast asleep when this was explained during the strategy meeting, weren’t you?”

“Yeah. I know I’ll be safe if I leave it to you. That policy’s never led me wrong.”

“Tes, tes,” said Fusae twice. She instructed everyone to begin a new bombing. “They chose to avoid Tres España by travelling over open sea. It takes time, but it is the best decision as they need not worry about getting other countries involved. But I did not expect such a low altitude. I expected them to be much higher. Well, at least they didn’t run right into us. ...Anyway, the track-and-field team will be heading out soon and the baseball team has already arrived. From the look of things down there, they’ve begun to move too.”

And so...

“Everyone! The battle begins!!”

Chapter 03: Travelers in the Sky

CHAPTER 3

"Travelers in the Sky"



When you leap
Is it your body that arrives?
Or is it your reason?
Point Allocation (Control)

When you leap

Is it your body that arrives?

Or is it your reason?

Point Allocation (Control)

On the back end of Okutama, Musashi Ariadust Academy was shaken by ringing warning bells, the rushing footsteps of students, and the vibrations of the bombing.

The torii-shaped crests of the defensive gravity barriers deployed around each ship of Musashi were shattered by the bombing. Everyone rushed to their stations below the glowing fragments and mist created from the destroyed barriers. They all looked up into the sky.

“Wait ,wait. Isn’t that the flagship of Tres España’s sports couple!? That’s vice-chancellor class!”

“Just hurry! Don’t let those debt-loving reddish-brown track suit wearers board us for free!!”

“The enemy ships that can’t descend onto us are descending to the port of Murayama and Oume! The firing unit and spell reinforcement unit need to build a formation just as you were trained and hurry there!”

The central command position among all the voices flying about was the bridge in front of the academy. A male student in glasses stood there with an armband that read “Secretary: Neshinbara Toussaint”. A dozen or so members of the broadcast, athletic, and cultural committees stood behind him giving instructions in rapid succession.

“The firing unit and reinforcement unit should focus on Oume. Murayama handles diplomacy and has a large number of foreign residents, so the enemy

should hesitate to target it. They should focus their fire on Oume to make up for their small numbers.”

Neshinbara paid no heed to the explosions, wind, and glowing mist as he placed his civil official Mouse on his shoulder and spread out several dozen torii-shaped crests. As he checked back over the information, he spoke.

“The land soldier groups need to spread out on Okutama and the central road of Musashino. The anti-air unit needs to divide the sky into blocks of three rows and assign each member one block, but they don’t have to fire until instructed to. Also, Honda should...um...”

Ohiroshiki appeared in a nearby sign frame. His eyebrows were raised in an insistent expression.

“Ahh! With Masazumi-kun and Futayo-kun, we have two Honda-kuns! To make this easier, we should call one Flat Honda-kun and one Large Honda-kun or maybe we can divide them up like monsters and call one Crossdressing Honda and one Spear Honda. But to me, they’re both old h-...Ah! What’s with that look, sensei!? Why are you reaching toward me with that smile!?”

The static-filled sign frame remained as a form of self-admonition and Neshinbara took a breath after giving Futayo advice on her attack. In no time, a sign frame appeared showing a female student running with another tall figure through a wide block used for transportation.

“Ah, Neshinbara? This is Heidi. We’re working on purging the transport ship and arranging another team. How are things going up there?”

“Well,” said Neshinbara as the falling glowing dust was swept away by the wind. He checked the countdown timer which said they had less than a minute until Tres España’s expected descent time. “They just announced their justification for the attack. Apparently, they are ‘capturing a ship transporting goods to England’ because that ship is currently in their territory.”

“Oh, maybe we should have stuck to the mainland more. I hear tours to view the wild unicorns and other creatures in the forests and coastal areas of Hexagone Française are popular right now. I wonder what location would have been best to look down on during battle.”

“Yes, we could have run a bird’s-eye view tour of magical beasts,” added the boy with Heidi.

It’s always money with those two. It’s just too wonderful, thought Neshinbara as he continued giving instructions.

“Listen, everyone. I will now discuss what the enemy is after and how we will respond.”

As everyone fell silent, Neshinbara opened his mouth. He began speaking as he thought on how troublesome the situation was.

“We may be under enemy attack, but I doubt they will enter the city itself. Judging from the ships that were unable to descend on us, they should only be able to send about 200 men down. If we view this as an attack on a fortress, Musashi is the same as a large city. If they send 200 men down into it, they will be in unfamiliar land and cut off from each other by the buildings and streets. We would eventually suppress them. If they stop Musashi, their Wyvern-class ships could ram us, but that isn’t enough to sink Musashi and I doubt they want to take prisoners of war while so close to England.

“That is why we need to think of this as an assault rather than an invasion. It’s similar to being attacked by pirates. They have no supply line, so we just have to survive their first attack. Our only goal besides that is to sink their ships. That’s the policy we’ll be going with.”

“Judge. But why would they attack us like this?”

“Judge. First, they are acting as a major Testament nation by showing their hostility toward Musashi. It will give them a definite right to negotiation at Westphalia and it lets them save face with the other nations.

“Second, they can gather information on Musashi’s combat abilities. That will help them in later conflicts and they can also sell the information to other nations. At the very least, information on an attack from above like this would be useful to any country truly wanting to invade Musashi. Most likely, their vice-chancellor class members and the representatives of their different units will attack us with different weapons and spells to gather data.

“And third, this is a warning to the people on Musashi. They want to cause a reaction by letting the people here know we really are ‘at war’. Bertoni-kun, how are things on that front?”

“Everyone currently aboard has signed a waiver of liability saying they themselves are responsible if they meet an unforeseen death aboard Musashi. The approximately 20% of those aboard who could not sign that contract were let off in Shikoku or Kyushu. Another 10% wish to be let off in their native countries.

“Fortunately, we did not lose anyone from the engine division or the commerce division, but it was recommended that any pregnant women and those with young children leave Musashi. Currently, students in middle school or higher are being encouraged to work part-time even at night, so there will be a rush of makeup classes once this war is over. We should receive plenty of refugees, people from the reservations, and other people who wish to become naturalized, so we should fill the gap eventually.”

“But didn’t Aoi-kun say that kind of one-sided waiver of liability isn’t a good thing?”

“Judge,” replied Bertoni with a shrug. “If something does happen, we have promised them three months of compensation money and the assurance that we will ‘listen to them’. But that is a small price to pay for some peace of mind for our citizens.”

“I see,” muttered Neshinbara just as a divine communications officer from the athletic committee shouted out behind him.

“I have word from the observers! Tres España has sent out a unit!”

Everyone in the command center let out voices of surprise. The reason for this was simple: The countdown timer before Neshinbara’s eyes said they should still have more than thirty seconds to spare.

But Neshinbara stared up into the advancing sky which was shaking and filled with sound and light.

“They’re using the bombing to focus our gravity barriers on the back while they leap over them toward the front. This is the strategy used by Tres Españan pirates. They usually target the bridge from the front, but this is just that in reverse.”

“But, Neshinbara, isn’t it dangerous for their unit to drop down into the city? Having prisoners taken now would lower their morale just before their battle with England... Not to mention that the bombing and the gravitational barriers are spread out across several hundred meters. How are they going to jump over that?”

“They have a way.” Neshinbara’s eyebrows rose slightly and he raised his right hand. “This will be bad if they’re confident in their ability to land accurately. Anti-air unit, get ready! Here they come!!”

He took a breath.

“Their vanguard is Tres España’s track-and-field team!”

“Okay, it’s time to go, track-and-field team!”

Fusae’s voice came from the bridge of Tres España’s command ship.

“Testament,” replied the students standing at the back of the command ship’s flat aircraft carrier deck.

The deck had eight lanes on the port side and eight lanes on the starboard side.

These sixteen lanes created courses approximately 30 meters long and one meter wide. The lanes continued from the back of the deck to the front.

“On your mark!”

The members of Tres España’s track-and-field team stood at the back of the lanes.

Their uniforms were made lightweight by cutting them off at the elbow and knee and they held shot put balls or javelins as *halteres*. As soon as they stepped atop the lanes, the lanes moved back. The motion was similar to a bow being slowly drawn.

“Mark!!”

The sixteen lanes stopped and a student standing at the front of the deck held a rifle into the air.

“Get set.”

As if nodding, the sixteen students standing at the back of the lanes crouched down.

“Get set!” they repeated while taking the stance of a crouching start.

An instant later, three different actions occurred.

First, the student at the front of the deck fired his rifle.

Second, the students began running from the back of the lane as if struck.

And third...

“...!!”

The sixteen lanes shot forward at high speed with the students still running on them. The rails on the deck were used to catapult the lanes forward.

“Go, long jump unit!”

The Kraken-class command ship was approximately three hundred meters long. As the catapult lanes rushed across the deck with a clear noise, the trial runners accelerated even further. The air became a wall that attempted to stop the runners. However...

“Go!” urged Fusae’s voice. “You are from Ootomo, Oouchi, and the other long-lived families coming from Kamakura. Tres España holds Dan-no-Ura, so we specialize in the Hassou Tobi^[4] used by Minamoto no Yoshitsune!!”

And so...

“Show them that we can move freely to and from the eight ships of Musashi!”

Everyone cried “Testament!” in response and activated their acceleration Testament spell charms.

“...!!”

And they ran. As they moved faster and faster, step after step, they could no longer stop or slow down. Finally, they all stepped on the foul lines at the end of the catapult lanes.

The foul lines glowed with the activation of Testament spells and accelerated the sixteen runners.

“Leap, Hassou Unit!!”

With a roar, they were launched.

Aboard Musashi, Neshinbara at the command center, Mitotsudaira as she ran, Naito as she flew, and everyone else watched on either directly or via the footage sent out by the broadcast committee.

Students in the long jump pose were fired from Tres España's command ship which was located directly above the front and center of Okutama.

There were sixteen of them and...

"They've broken the record of 800 meters! They've passed the gravitational barriers and are headed for-..."

The anti-air unit readied their bows and spells as they listened to the divine transmission from the command center. However...

"Do not fire!!"

They all stopped when they heard Neshinbara's voice.

Fusae heard Neshinbara's command because they were intercepting Musashi's divine transmissions. She whistled on the bridge.

"I'm impressed any of them saw through this. So this is Ariadust's secretary."

As she spoke, several *cadena firma* appeared in the windows. A divine transmission officer explained the situation.

"The Hassou unit is being launched in order! The first group is landing now!"

A new light suddenly appeared beyond the current light and wind.

A single red beam of light stretched up into the air.

"Landing signal confirmed! Red means they arrived at their target destination!!"

Joyous cries of “testament” filled the bridge. The sixteen Tres Español students they watched were not in Musashi’s city. They were...

“On top of the large transportation cargo yet to be brought inside Musashi!”

Trade between the ships of Musashi used the container transport loop created from the towing belts placed along the thick ropes spanning the distance between ships. Sixteen students stood atop those wooden boxes while wrapped in the shimmering of their acceleration spells. The containers they stood on were at least twenty meters tall and they were filled with...

“The materials being transported in the morning are mostly the food, drinking water, and resources needed that afternoon. If they destroy those, it will greatly affect their food supplies starting this afternoon.”

Fusae smiled and gave instructions to the ships, to the sixteen students who had landed, and to the additional students being launched in groups of sixteen. She sent them locations to attack using her stylus pen.

“Okay, that prevents Musashi from targeting you indiscriminately from below. So for now, attack with everything you have. To put it simply,” she said, “begin the throwing events!!”

On Fusae’s instruction, the leading group of sixteen dropped the free-fall bombs attached to the hard points on the back of their uniform’s shoulders.

The black bombs were approximately sixty centimeters long. They were hexagonal cylinders formed from wooden panels.

The sixteen students each had one on each shoulder, so a total of thirty-two bomb cylinders were dropped. As the sounds and light of the bombing washed over them, they began slowly but surely picked up speed and could be heard cutting through the wind.

“Begin intercepting the warheads!!”

On Neshinbara's instruction, an anti-air spell formation was spread out. This was the same system used to intercept shells during the battle of Mikawa. The spell formation was used to track the enemy bombs and then they were intercepted.

However, another divine transmission arrived from the command center.

"A second and third group are arriving! They're trying to reach beyond the range of our defenses!"

Tres España's command ship was visible overhead, remaining perfectly stationary relative to Musashi. The eight lanes on the right and left of the deck opened in a fan shape starting from the base at the back.

Countless metallic noises and the sounds of wrapping wires and chains could be heard as track-and-field team members were launched above Musashi by the opening of the deck.

This group had decided where to land after seeing how Musashi spread out its forces. A group of sixteen reached a part of the sky not covered by the tracking spell formation and landed atop the cargo being towed.

This group began dropping their bomb cylinders while still in the air.

However, yet another attack arrived at the same time.

"Don't forget about the sides!!"

As that shout echoed sharply through the air, a bombardment arrived from port.

It came from the three Wyvern-class ships flying perpendicular to Musashi on the left.

The three ships had backstop-style sails raised and a boy and girl stood on the deck of the central ship. They both wore brimmed hats and had a number and name written on their backs.

The boy with long bangs had the number I and the name Watanabe/P. Valdés on his back. The girl with short hair had the number XVIII and the name Watanabe/F. Valdés on her back.

Those preparing defensive spells on the port side of Musashi all gasped when they saw those two holding gloves and metal balls.

“Wah! Those are Tres España’s Valdés siblings, Pedro and Flores of the four deadly balls!”

The younger sister looked surprised to hear that.

“Oh, brother. They know us even though we didn’t make it past the best eight last year.”

Everyone on the port side of Musashi nodded, exchanged a glance, and spoke.

“When the brother pitched four balls, all four of them hit the batter, giving the other team one point. The sister laughed at him and pitched four balls of her own, but they all hit the batters too, giving the other team four more points. But the other team had lost eight players, so it ended in a no contest!”

“Sh-shut up! They tried to jump out of the way, but jumped right into my pitches! It’s all because my brother gave them the wrong idea about what I was going to do!”

“Sister, I have a large strike zone. Unlike you, I am a natural pitcher.”

“Brother, what do you mean by natural?”

“Sister, you hit them by accident. *I* hit them on purpose. That shows how much more control I have.”

“Did you have any intention of playing baseball!?”

The sister nodded in agreement with that shout coming from Musashi, but she suddenly entered a stance.

She was about to pitch.

The sister lowered her body in a right-handed underhand throw. The brother took the stance of a left-handed overhand throw.

A glowing mist floated from the Testament spell charms attached to their waists. Along with repeated sounds of metal being struck, the two of them readied their arms and the brother spoke first.

“We of the Bungo Navy and the Watanabe family offer a prayer to the saint of sailors, Saint Elmo.”

The sister bent her body and gathered strength.

“Mouse ‘El Fuego’ – Receive.”

A bluish-white flame appeared between the two of them.

Cross-shaped crests appeared on the back of the hand holding the ball, the same elbow, their waist, and their legs.

“Oh, holy flame. Put the wind to our back, our target in front of us, strength in our shoulders, and a will in our hearts. Please let us remember our strength and bring light to the darkness even if there is no light in the heavens.”

“Yes,” they both muttered. “Burn, oh flame!!”

Just as they uttered those words, they launched their metal balls. As if their tightly drawn bodies were being shot forward, the cross crests on their legs, waist, back, shoulders, elbows, and hands all burst.

“!!”

The metal balls launched fire as they flew, but an instant later...

“Go, magic ball!”

The students on the port side of Musashi frantically activated their defensive torii-shaped crests.

They were located on the edge of the deck, in the sky, and by the door of the closing transportation zone. Their shields had been prepared to defend against pirates and to avoid fires and collapses within the different districts of the city.

“They’ll break through if you hold them vertical! Tilt them to deflect the balls!”

The two flying balls flew straight toward the edge of the deck.

The balls struck the torii-shaped crest shields.

Everyone expected a tremendous noise followed by a few of the shields disappearing. However...

“Eh?”

Everyone standing where the balls were expected to hit raised a voice of question once a moment passed and the impact still had not come.

Nothing had happened.

All they saw in the sky before them was a large amount of Testament spell charm fragments scattering into the air from the waists of the two pitchers. Those two straightened their backs and seemed unconcerned that the flames had disappeared.

“Striiiiike!”

Everyone holding the spell shields heard loud sounds of destruction from behind them.

The city behind them had suddenly been destroyed by a metal ball.

“...!?”

The balls completely ignored the defenders and made their way behind them.

“A magic disappearing ball!?”

As everyone turned around, they saw more than just normal destruction.

Up in the sky on top of the large wooden containers, the enemy track-and-field team dropped their bombs. And when they burst, they spewed out certain objects. Bundles of paper scattered through the air.

“Those are combustion spell charms!”

The anti-air unit had intercepted a lot of the free-fall bombs, but over one hundred track-and-field team members had been launched. Over half of those had intentionally landed in areas where the anti-air unit could not intercept them.

The several dozen bombs that landed struck the ground or buildings. As soon as they did, their wooden frames would burst and those papers would scatter everywhere. This created one overall effect: fire.

They formed red pillars of fire.

And they burned.

During the initial stage, the fires were kept low by the fireproofing spells set up across Musashi, but the flames eventually flickered and rose up into the sky as if breaking through whatever was holding them back.

Pillars of fire over twenty meters tall and seven or eight meters wide whirled around and rose into the sky.

The flames vigorously shot up, gently fell as the pillar came apart, and enveloped the nearby buildings.

“Take cover!”

A wind blew.

The flames appearing across the city all at once consumed the air and formed a great wind along the streets. The wind picked up the heat of the flames and grew blazing hot.

“Get down!!”

As if gasping for air, the blazing wind shot along and gathered together in search of a wide open space. The wind eventually reached the central street and the outer edges of the ship.

The wind was already hot enough to scorch the surfaces of buildings and singe the leaves of the trees along the street. As it gathered together, the students who did not take cover were blown away. The shields they were holding up while crouching down were snatched from their grip and the wind continued to maddeningly scorch everything along the main roads.

The wind showed its fury.

On the central street, it formed a blazing tornado. On the outer edges of the ship, it formed a blazing waterfall spilling over the edge of the deck and into the sky.

“...!”

Merely enduring the rampaging heat and wind was all anyone could do. They were in the sky above the ocean. More air flowed in right away, so the heat formed massive waves that refused to stop.

“At this rate...!”

Everyone clenched their teeth and groaned as the siblings off the port side prepared their second shot.

But that was not all. On the deck to the siblings’ left and right and on the other ships too, members of the baseball team held up metal balls or bats.

The Valdés brother in the center adjusted his hat and turned his head to the side.

“Do you know what Tres España is called?”

He held the ball up into the air. He held it toward the heavens and placed it over the sun.

“It’s the empire on which the sun never sets. The Far East, on the other hand, is the land of the rising sun. And even if the sun sets, Tres España is prepared to take a torch in hand and continue on. So let me say this.” He took a deep breath. “Each time a torch is lit to light the darkness, the empire that does nothing but rely on the rising sun is a step closer to defeat. Amen. Hopefully this next pitch will bring you a large step toward defeat. Yes, a very large one.”

As he spoke, the siblings began their pitching motions and activated their spells.

“Shit!” cried the defenders.

They had their hands full simply surviving with the waves of heat washing over everything.

And the metal balls were thrown toward them and the city. Tres España’s baseball team, including the second string players, joined in this time, so eighty or so metal balls flew toward Musashi. During their follow-through they cried out.

“Take this! Saint Elmo’s Fire!!”

The defenders remained motionless, but they heard another voice.

“Please take defensive positions against the enemy’s attacks!”

This sharply ringing voice belonged to a girl. At the same time, a single line of light shot into the air.

That light was an arrow strengthened by borrowing a divine sound. The attack targeted the bottom of the abandoned material transportation boxes overhead.

The arrow of light shot in a straight line and struck the 20 meter tall wooden box.

“Hit.”

To prove her right, the container was pierced through and burst apart.

As the container shot upwards and came apart, sounds of creaking wood and pieces of wood striking each other could be heard and the contents of the container were dumped into the air. Those contents were...

“Water!!”

The leader of the anti-air unit on the port side and the one who had fired that arrow was a girl with a nametag reading Asama.

She finished her follow-through, lowered her bow which was named Kataume, and looked up into the air with her eyebrows raised.

“That should put the fire out!”

The container had been destroyed approximately 200 meters above Musashi and the water opened up like a flower as it fell.

The water came from the water tank used in Musashi’s industrial zone.

As the flower of water spread out, it looked a bit like a jellyfish and flower petals bloomed as if sliding across the air. However...

“Ohh...”

As the defenders taking cover from the waves of heat and Asama both looked up at it, the flower shook in the wind and finally scattered.

What ultimately fell was rain. The wooden container had been over 20 meters tall and it had held over 40,000 liters of water.

That was enough water to cause ten centimeters of rain over a distance of approximately 60 meters square, so the rain covered an entire wide block on Musashi.

However, the anti-air fire producing rain did not stop at that single shot. Asama glanced to the sign frame next to her while nocking a new arrow and having her Mouse named Hanami announce her divine protection.

The red torii-style sign frame showed Heidi.

“In addition to purging the transport ships being towed and arranging the separate unit, we’ll send you the locations of the water tanks we have paid for! A-and Asamachi!” Heidi took a breath, clenched her fists, and swung them down while letting out a shout. “Take out these enemies or whoever they are!”

“Um...”

“Eh? Wh-what is it, Asamachi!? You’re acting really low-key. Are you okay!?”

“No, um... What do you mean ‘take them out’? Shrine maidens don’t shoot people.”

“Would you be willing to shoot them if you weren’t a shrine maiden?”

What kind of person do they think I am? wondered Asama as she aimed her bow toward the sky.

She was targeting the containers being towed, but some male Tres Españan students stood on top of them. They were dropping shells and throwing javelins down, but they suddenly froze in place when they saw her.

“Ee! Th-that’s the rumored trigger-happy shrine maiden!”

Asama smiled with veins popping out on her temple as she fired at the wooden containers.

“Would you look at that...”

With the light board in one hand, Fusae raised her eyebrows on the bridge of Tres España’s command ship.

As Musashi put out the fire by paying out of their own pocket, a few other actions were using that as cover.

“Captain! The containers the team members are on have started moving back from where they were initially!”

Fusae knew what that control member meant. The wooden boxes were indeed moving back toward them. This was due to...

“They cut the transportation towing belt sending the containers through the air, didn’t they!?”

The loop of thick ropes towing the containers travelled between the ships and wrapped around the ships to keep the containers circulating forward, backward, left, and right. However...

“If that loop is fixed at the front of one ship and they cut it from the back...”

The inertia of the advancing ship would cause the cut end to swing backwards toward them.

And on top of that swinging towing belt was...

“Captain! The enemy is coming!”

As the thick rope began to reach them, Musashi’s students charged toward them.

The instant Fusae saw Musashi’s assault unit, she gave orders.

“Track-and-field team, withdraw!!”

When they heard that shout, the track-and-field team members on the containers did not hesitate to throw themselves into the air. They leaped away from Musashi or between the ships. In this high-speed withdrawal, they would wait to use their descent slowing Testament spell charms until they had almost reached the ocean surface. Two of the baseball team's ships off the port side began descending to pick them up.

However, Musashi's students were approaching from atop the now deserted containers.

"Here they come! They're trying to bring the fight to our ship!!"

That was the right decision, assessed Fusae silently.

The leading members of the group swiftly moving toward their target would likely have belonged to Mikawa's guard unit. By going first, they would act as guides to show those less accustomed to battle what to do.

So far, Musashi's fight had been centered on the anti-air unit and the shield unit. However, there had been a reason for that.

"The assault unit was on standby so they could attack the second the cut towing belt formed a bridge."

They had withstood the initial attack using only their defensive units and were now going to counterattack. It was a basic strategy, but it had been the residents of Musashi that had managed to find a way onto their ship so quickly.

However, Fusae had nothing to worry about. Cleverness meant nothing on the battlefield. What mattered were the fundamentals needed to respond to any situation or environment and the ability to innovate. If one was led astray by a clever performance, one would lose one's nerve and be defeated.

This was the same.

Musashi had spare towing belts and the port at England was not far away, so the decision to cut the belt would not have taken long.

...But they decided to climb aboard it and to accept some initial damages in order to have the assault unit on standby. They have a strategist who can look beyond what is right before his eyes.

“Yes, this is someone worth remembering. Also, I’ll be heading out, Taka-san.”

Takakane clicked his tongue within a cross-style *cadena firma*.

“Fusae, the members of the baseball team on this ship will do their best to hold them back. You always want to head out right away, but a ghost isn’t supposed to go out under the sun.”

“You go out there all the time.”

“I have a nice tan, so I’m fine.”

“Tes, tes,” said Fusae with a smile. She then took a breath, put on a serious expression, and addressed everyone on the bridge. “Open the ship’s gunports. We don’t have much ammunition because we intended to bomb them, but fire on their shield unit over a slow interval. Instead of trying to do damage to their city, try to keep as many people as possible concentrated on defense. Meanwhile, move the ship to a safe place behind Ariadust and start firing on the school building at the same interval.

“Taka-san, I’ll leave the deck to you. I will head out after speaking with the three in the back.”

Fusae brushed her back hair into position and everyone on the bridge turned toward her.

“Tes. Leave it to us, captain!” said the female managers of the bridge crew as they saw Fusae off with a smile.

However, their smiles quickly faded. A new noise was added to the sounds of battle outside.

This sound did not come from the battlefield. Rather than simply coming from the direction of Musashi, it seemed to be coming from Musashi itself.

As Musashi cruised toward England, its eight ships suddenly began rumbling and warning bells began ringing.

A single automaton stood atop the bridge in front of Ariadust Academy which had been made the command center.

It was “Musashi”.

She wore a maid uniform and seemed to be paying no heed to flashes of light coming from the bombardment still being fired on the back of the academy and the gravitational barriers blocking those attacks.

“On Neshinbara-sama’s suggestion, Musashi will now enter gravitational cruising mode. Once preparations are complete, we will leave the battle’s airspace. Output control of all ships is being centralized. Control rights are being transferred to me. Over.”

As she spoke, a few different lights appeared in front of “Musashi”. These eight blue lights took the forms of ships. Each light represented one ship and the sign frame next to each one displayed the automaton that acted as that ship’s captain. They all nodded in unison.

“Preparing for gravitational cruising. Transferring control rights to ‘Musashi’-sama. Over.”

The eight ship diagrams in front of “Musashi” all began to move.

First, a red dot appeared on the back of Okutama to indicate her own location. Then, green dots appeared at the center of each ship and pale green ribbon lines connected them.

“Centralized control confirmed. Over,” said “Musashi” as the eight ship diagrams changed form.

They bloomed into flowers.

The eight ship diagrams created eight flower beds filled with flowers made from ether light.

Each flower bed was about fifty centimeters across and a meter and a half long. They were small flower beds, but the flowers bloomed tall and densely to wholeheartedly assert themselves.

“Musashi” turned toward the flower beds and lightly spread her arms.

“Release each ship’s reserve ether fuel storage pool by twelve percent. Over.”

Just as she finished speaking, rain fell on the flower beds.

Rain made up of bluish-white light poured on the flowers and their stems and leaves trembled and grew.

But as if drawn on by that growth...

“Beginning auxiliary preparations for gravitational cruising. Over.”

All of Musashi’s ships suddenly shook as if shivering.

The eight ships of Musashi trembled.

The frame, the internal structure, the different circulatory pathways, and the reinforcing spells added into the important points of the air ducts and buildings all activated due to the supply of ether. The shaking occurred because Musashi’s strength was rising.

Normally, Musashi’s strength was not obtained simply from the rigidity of the ships’ frames. With ships as huge as Musashi’s, simply turning would cause the

frame to break and warp, so a bending flexibility was needed. In Musashi's case, that flexibility was obtained by giving each ship a large number of gaps and movable frames.

However, those movable parts were being reinforced with the extra supply of ether and with spells to reinforce public property. The movable parts' lubrication was hardened with friction and the frame was further hardened with defensive spells.

This change produced the trembling which proved Musashi was strengthening. Finally, Musashi gave a lurch.

As if in response, the rain over "Musashi's" flower beds let up.

"Please carry out the final check. Over."

A number of sign frames appeared above the flower beds.

The important points across each ship were being checked.

The output, the stability, the safety of the people, and the safety of the air circulation all had to be checked, but those could not all be checked immediately. The checks had begun at the beginning of the entire process. This was merely a final confirmation.

" 'Tama'. A cat is sleeping on the road in the 6th wide block. Over."

"Judge. Someone skilled has already been sent to retrieve it. 4, 3, 2...it has been retrieved. I can now confirm the safety on the streets of each ship. Over."

"Judge," replied "Musashi". And, "We will now enter gravitational cruising mode. Gravitational cruising can be used for 32 seconds using the released surplus ether supply. Our objective is to leave this area and confirm our ability to travel by gravitational cruising.

“Each ship will switch from the standard cruising system ‘Susashizunami’ to the gravitational cruising system ‘Susashizukaze’. Please keep the ether extraction device ‘Kazearizuma’ fully open. Over.”

As she spoke, the flowers in the beds began to move. Some of the flowers opened wide to form a line and they stretched up.

“Beginning transformation into gravitational cruising form. Gravitational cruising will begin in three minutes at which point we will leave this airspace at full speed. As such,” she took a breath, “please survive the battle until then. Over.”

Chapter 04: Those who Intermingle between Heaven and Earth

CHAPTER 4

"Those who Intermingle between Heaven and Earth"



Which is more difficult:
Looking up?
Or looking down?
Point Allocation (Gaze)

Which is more difficult:

Looking up?

Or looking down?

Point Allocation (Gaze)

The vibration of Musashi and the uncountable number of metallic noises brought about a single great result.

Namely, Musashi transformed.

Each ship of that steel fleet measuring several kilometers in length began spreading out into another form.

First, the sides of the unique hull area making up the front and back of each ship split open. Those outer walls that possessed tremendous area began sliding outward and several panels piled on top of each other from below like a heat sink. This expanded the surface area further.

Next, a few pieces of the ships' substructure spread out to support the bilge keels that extended like wings on either side of the ships' undersides. The keels formed wings for the ships.

Finally, the bows of the first left and right ships and the front center ship extended the outer walls past their foundations to fix the ships in place.

Many other transformations, both small and large, occurred, but ultimately...

"Wait..." muttered someone from Tres España. "Why do we call this thing quasi-Bahamut? ...It's enough of a giant beast as it is."

Once the transformation was complete, Musashi's giant form had sharp wings extending from the six ships on the left and right.

However, the battlefield continued to move even as the giant ship transformed.

On one side was the Tres Españan command ship firing on Musashi and on the other was Musashi's students making their way to the command ship's deck in order to stop it.

Musashi's assault unit ran along the towing belts to bring the conflict to Tres España's command ship.

“Swing!!”

It began when Tres España's baseball team began hitting shells toward the several arriving towing belts.

Meanwhile, the catchers gathered on the deck and lanes that the towing belts led to and worked to stop the Musashi students.

“Don't worry about the bottom! Protect the deck!!”

They clashed.

Musashi's students had momentum from running, but their center of gravity was high due to running up in a line. Tres España's students could not move forward because they were crouched down, but they had a greater number of people and a lower center of gravity.

“!!”

Both sides formed a straight scrum and struggled between the deck and the towing belts. Defensive cross-style shields appeared and torii-style crests that increased one's assault power were formed. The two would quickly shatter, but new ones would soon take their place.

Whenever Musashi's students put a foot up on the deck or lanes, the catchers would use their familiarity with moving on the ship to force them back.

That was when the batters began hitting balls toward them. Musashi's assault team's momentum was entirely in the forward direction, so this attack from the side caused them to waver.

The catchers did not overlook this opening. While making sure they did not protrude from the deck, they forced the assault team back a bit. The batters then swung their bats even harder.

“Knock them out of the park! We can keep them away for good!”

“Testament!”

In the next moment, almost half of the batters were blown away.

“!?”

The attack had come from a black mass of speed that looked like a gust of wind. A group of witches all wearing Ariadust uniforms flew by. Leading them was a black witch with an armband reading “3rd Special Duty – Margot Naito”.

Naito spoke as she saw the enemy batters blown away by her and the other witches' attacks.

“That takes care of our interception as the witch unit!”

Her unit numbered 12 in total. They had struck the batters with metal pipes meant for the scaffolding used during Musashi's maintenance.

They had thrown the pipes with a bit of spin added on and had knocked the batters several meters through the air while they had stopped moving in order to swing their bats. By the time the sound of the impact rang out, the witches had already passed by the command ship and scattered in the sky while sending a great roar cutting through the air.

...That went well, but it probably won't work a second time.

The witch unit included some first years. Most of them had never experienced combat, so they could not handle anything beyond a surprise attack where they charged in on a straight line, threw a weapon, and immediately flew away.

Naito doubted it would work once the enemy had their guard up.

That was why Naito left the others as they scattered. Equipped with Schwarz Fräulein, she used her own speed and behavior to circle the sky and observe the bridge of the command ship. She turned around and positioned the broom to take her directly toward the front of the enemy ship.

...If I can end this here, I should go for it!

The personal instruction Neshinbara had given Naito was to damage the face-like bridge of the enemy command ship. This attack held a different meaning from simply damaging the sides or the deck. After all, Musashi had been disarmed.

“But we’ll show them we can still sink their ship!”

If they could prove that, it would negate the entire meaning of the attack. At the very least, it would make the other countries of a similar strength think twice before attacking Musashi.

...And if my aim is dead on here, Ga-chan will probably be so moved she’ll make me a lingonberry tart!

“So here I go!!”

She pulled a roll of coins from the portable safe at her waist and snapped it onto the nozzle of the cowl broom Schwarz Fräulein as she held it aloft.

If this hit, the assault team down below would receive little damage and Naruze would no longer have to worry.

Please hit, thought Naito as she began playback of the attack spell.

A speedometer-style acceleration spell Magie Figur appeared.

“Herrlich!!”

Naito fired five rolls of 100 yen coins (for a total of 25,000 yen) toward the bridge of the command ship, one after another.

The five shots were fired from approximately 120 meters away. The 25,000 yen scattered golden feathers and flew toward the explosive-resistant windows of the enemy ship's bridge. By Naito's estimation, the glass would break at around the third shot.

“Go!” she shouted while following the path of the bullets with her eyes.

But then...

“That's five shots, so it goes down to 1/5, Takakane.”

“That's right, Vela. And when I halve the speed, it effectively goes down to 1/10.”

She heard two voices. One came from the top of the bridge and the other from the center of the deck.

The five bullets then struck the bridge's window.

Five sounds rang out, but they were all dull sounds of impact rather than clear sounds of shattering glass.

...*Eh?*

It was obvious why Naito's eyes had opened wide. Those five destructive bullets had not so much as shaken the explosive-resistant glass. They had been repelled like leaves in the wind.

As Naito watched, all five rolls of coins definitely hit. However...

...They didn't work at all!?

“Well? Are you at least a little surprised?”

A voice came from above the bridge. Someone who had apparently been lying on the armor panels there sat up while holding a bottle of something alcoholic. He was a slender long-lived man with stubble on his chin and he wore a brimless hat.

“Secretary of Tres España’s student council, Velázquez!?”

And he was not alone. She had heard two voices before.

One had been Velázquez’s from atop the bridge, but the other had come from the person standing in the center of the deck.

This other person’s feet seemed to fade away into nothing.

“Tres España’s Chancellor's Officers Vice Chancellor, Hironaka Takakane!”

“That’s right. People tend to overlook me, but you seem to know me well enough.”

Takakane wore a brimmed helmet and carried a long bat on his back that had been modified into a batter’s wooden mace. He laughed when the flying witch shouted his name.

He nodded as he raised the feather-like giant sword that emitted ether light before his eyes.

“You may be the 3rd special duty officer, but you had the bad luck of running across the vice chancellor and the secretary. Not to mention these.”

Takakane held up his large sword.

Behind him, Velázquez held up his own large sword.

Those swords were...

“We have the Testamenta Arma given to Tres España, Crus Temperantia – Novum and Vetus.”

As the two enemies held up their weapons, Neshinbara clenched his teeth on the academy bridge.

“They brought their Testamenta Arma out to the very edge of Tres Españan territory!?”

That’s crazy, thought Neshinbara.

Just as Naruze had explained that morning, the Testamenta Arma were divine weapons that used the power of the Testaments as a fuel source and had been given to the Testament nations.

But because they used the Testaments to fuel themselves, the Testamenta Arma could only be used above the ley lines of the territory that nation controlled. They could not be brought across borders like the Logismoi Oplo.

...Musashi’s path remains on the provisional borderlines between nations, but they still brought them!

“They have guts to bring those to a battlefield that could easily leave their territory!”

If Musashi’s course left their territory and moved beyond the ley lines, those weapons would lose their output, but the enemy had still built them into their strategy.

Neshinbara felt that took guts, but he still had to put together a countermeasure.

Tres España’s Testamenta Arma controlled the cardinal virtue of temperance.

...What powers do Crus Temperantia – Novum and Vetus have!?

Before Neshinbara could give any instructions, he heard Takakane speak.

“You can feel it for yourself, can’t you? My Crus Temperantia – Vetus stretches my opponent’s time out to double the length. Time is money, as they say.”

Next, Velázquez spoke.

He gave the effects of Crus Temperantia – Novum.

“Mine is simple. My temperance divides the strength of my opponent’s ability by the number of times that ability is used.”

Naito understood what it meant to stretch out her time and divide her ability’s strength by the number of times she used it.

She had fired five shots in a row earlier.

They had likely used their Crus Temperantias just before she attacked. She had fired five times, so the strength dropped to $1/5$.

By doubling the time of the attack, the strength dropped to $1/10$.

That was why her bullets had not pierced the bridge’s window.

Naito felt great danger, but not because her attack had not worked. She looked down to her comrades attacking from the towing belts below.

“Have some temperance, residents of Musashi.”

Their speed, defense, and ability to endure were all reduced. Several people were blown away by the bombardment from the baseball team.

And it did not end there. Naito suddenly felt the speed and strength of her wings drop.

...Oh, no!

Even the flapping of her wings was being reduced.

As her speed immediately dropped and she lost her balance, the enemy made their move. The bombarding batters set their sights on her. They tossed up shells and hit them toward her.

And just before those shells struck...

“You can reduce it if you want, but this started out at 10 tons!”

That sudden voice was followed by a vermillion giant dropping down from above.

That great mass fell from the sky and struck the deck of the command ship. It produced a great roar as it landed.

The shock of impact caused the deck to dip down and then pop back up. Standing in the middle of the deck was a female god of war wearing red and white armor. The girl standing on its vermillion shoulder spoke the god of war’s name.

“Masa-yan!? You came to save me!?” shouted Naito.

“Judge! On Neshinbara’s orders! 6th Special Duty Officer, Naomasa! Even while reduced, Jizuri Suzaku has plenty of strength!!”

Naomasa listened to Neshinbara’s instructions coming from a sign frame. He was managing several other instructions at the same time.

“Naomasa-kun, the enemy is acting quickly. They are most likely trying to have this attack double as something like an all-star game. I have no intention of going along with that, so take care of things until I can prepare a way to end this. ...You and Jizuri Suzaku should be able to survive that long!”

“Don’t make assumptions,” replied Naomasa with a grin on the corner of her mouth.

Naomasa chose a single method of attack: a powerful fastball using one of the god of war wrenches hanging from the latch at Jizuri Suzaku's waist.

With her strength being reduced, she had to make the first and least-reduced attacks count. Her first target would be the enemy ship's bridge. She also had to help out her comrades.

...Is Naito okay?

She glanced over and spotted Naito's golden wings outside of the danger zone. She had escaped because the shaking of the deck had forced the batters and catchers to focus on keeping their balance. The assault unit had moved those affected by the ability reduction to the back of the line.

"In that case," said Naomasa as she had Jizuri Suzaku swing up the wrench.
"Throw it! Jizuri Suzaku!!"

The god of war complied.

...Having time stretched out to twice as long is dangerous!

From Naomasa's perspective, her body's movements were normal. However, everything around her moved quickly. The clouds moved by at high speed and the wind felt painfully strong. On the other hand, Jizuri Suzaku appeared to move at normal speed.

"And the wrench too!"

The wrench flew through the air at normal speed while the Tres Españan students moved at high speed. They showed no unnecessary movement and they moved with the speed of a clockwork doll.

However, they were not actually moving quickly.

...I'm moving slowly!

Even her senses were being slowed, but everything felt normal because everything else directly around her was slow as well.

To someone else, she would appear to be moving at half the normal speed.

Naomasa turned to the wrench. It appeared to be flying at normal speed, but it had to be moving slowly. However...

...It'll make it!

“Nothing’s impossible with the strength of a god of war!”

The wrench flew on a collision course. Its speed had dropped, but the wrench was massive. Even that explosive-resistant glass would not survive a direct hit from that mass of metal.

Go, thought Naomasa as she watched on in her low-speed state.

Behind Takakane who stood below the bridge, the front of the base supporting the bridge opened.

As the hatch to a hangar door opened, the center of the deck slid to the right and left. This revealed a large catapult lane inside the hangar.

As Naomasa watched on, alarms blared and something appeared from within that dimly-lit hangar.

“A god of war!?”

Naomasa gathered all of the knowledge she had on the enemy. Tres España possessed a god of war force primarily to help settle and conquer the New World. A certain person stood at the center of that force.

...Era Fusae, the captain of the aerial unit's track-and-field team!

God of war aircraft carriers were slow, so none had been used in this surprise attack.

Naomasa had therefore assumed Tres España would not send any gods of war into this battle, but it appeared they had an ace up their sleeve.

“Warning,” blared an announcement.

Before Naomasa could think “This isn’t good”, she had another thought.

...This field was left to me!

With a heavy noise, the enemy appeared from the hangar.

It swung its right hand up and lightly grabbed the wrench flying through the air.

“Tres España flagcraft Michiyuki Byakko entering the battlefield.”

It was a white god of war. Its female design had the upper body and legs made quite large. Its shoulders stuck out and a long-lived woman stood on its right shoulder. Her feet seemed sunk into the god of war.

Several *cadena firma* of the spell OS running the god of war appeared around its face and shoulders. An odd noise came from its hand. The handle of the wrench shattered and it fell in pieces to the deck.

Naomasa sensed danger in this enemy’s power as she saw Michiyuki Byakko roar at double speed. With the *cadena firma* of the spell OS wrapped around it, its roar shook the air and sounded partly high-pitched. As the sound echoed into the distance, Michiyuki Byakko lowered its body and Era Fusae turned toward Naomasa.

She then turned toward Takakane who stood at her feet.

“Taka-san, take that Testamenta Arma and jump.”

“Sure, sure. Testament.”

With Crus Temperantia – Vetus in hand, Takakane lightly jumped straight up.

“There.”

The instant his body entered the air, Fusae gently pointed in Naomasa’s direction.

“Michiyuki Byakko! Go!”

Naomasa gasped as Michiyuki Byakko’s giant form shot across the deck while slipping between Takakane’s legs. Even taking into account the 1/2 reduction to her senses, the white god of war still had definite momentum.

“!”

Michiyuki Byakko dashed along the lane to pick up even more speed.

The toes of its feet dug into the metal catapult lane to acquire the power of friction. Each time its legs moved, its giant body accelerated as if writhing in pain.

Meanwhile, Naomasa had already had Jizuri Suzaku take a defensive position. However...

...What’s going to happen!?

Not only were her reaction speed and action speed slowed, but her power was being divided as well. She would not be able to correct Jizuri Suzaku’s position at the instant of impact and she would not be able to draw out its usual output.

She could only come up with negative thoughts and she gave a mental click of her tongue.

However, she heard a voice. It belonged to a girl rushing in from outside the battlefield.

This girl spoke two short and sharp words.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!”

A heavy noise rang out and was soon followed by a second shout and another heavy noise.

This was followed by scattering light and a sound similar to a thin membrane of air bursting.

The power of the two Testamenta Arma had been destroyed with a cut each.

These cuts had come from the person standing on the edge of the towing belt lifted up from the back of one of Musashi's ships like the raised head of snake.

“Musashi Ariadust Academy's vice chancellor Honda Futayo has arrived!!”

Immediately afterwards, Naomasa felt her senses recover.

She gave a nod in thanks for Futayo's assistance.

Now that's a welcome intrusion! she thought.

But the enemy struck before she could even breathe a sigh of relief.

An intense noise rang out and the entire command ship shook.

Metal creaked, a few parts snapped, and the lubricant instantly rose in temperature as Jizuri Suzaku was pushed back by the catapult lane and the white god of war. Sparks flew from the ground at its feet.

“!!”

In the wind ahead of her, she could see Fusae. She was so close that Naomasa could have reached out and touched her.

She had been smiling before but was not any longer. Her head was hanging down.

“I was interested in Musashi’s ‘Suzaku’. As a god of war user, I’m sure you have heard of the several divine weapon class gods of war that were either inherited from the Age of the Gods or built during the history recreation.”

Naomasa had heard of them. She was pushed back as she heard Fusae continue to speak.

“Fifty years ago, the Catholic Rebellion in the Far East’s history recreation took place on Tres Españan land. The rebel army decided to create four gods of war. Perhaps to defend island of the rebellion, they created gods of war based on the four sacred guardian beasts. However, one of them was captured during the prototype phase and one has been spotted in another country. The captured one is Michiyuki Byakko here.”

Naomasa was being pushed back, but the impact passed through Jizuri Suzaku. They floated up into the air a bit.

“Two of them have yet to be found, the Genbu and the Suzaku, but various countries have built their own gods of war using those names. I don’t know if they’re trying to pass them off as the real ones or if they simply used the name, but what about your Suzaku?”

As Fusae continued to push forward, the corner of her mouth rose in a smile.

“I suppose it doesn’t matter. The specialized spell OSs of the four sacred beast gods of war give them divine weapon level abilities matching the Mountain-River-Path-Swamp correspondence of the four sacred beasts. In Michiyuki Byakko’s case...”

A beat later, light appeared down below.

Naomasa remembered this. As a god of war user and as an academy officer, she knew the ability of the god of war belonging to Era Fusae, Tres España’s 2nd special duty officer.

“...it is ‘path’. Under any circumstances and in any location, Michiyuki Byakko has the same absolute footing and evasive ability as on a large path.”

White *cadena firma* of the spell OS opened on either side of Michiyuki Byakko’s legs. Countless cross-style crests bloomed from them.

“Travel along that large path, Michiyuki Byakko.”

Naomasa saw all of those crosses instantaneously shatter and change form. As the crosses turned to ether light, some of them formed land covered in heads of wheat, some of them formed a line of trees along the path, some became the sky, and some became wind and clouds. In the end, a translucent field was created in midair. And...

“!!”

Michiyuki Byakko charged out into the air with Jizuri Suzaku along with it.

The battles occurring in the air above Musashi and off its port side continually shook the eight ships.

As the long ships vibrated like strings being plucked, most of the student council, academy officers, and committee members were out on the front lines, but one of the officers was rushing through the student dorms and residential districts.

It was Naruze.

She used her six black wings to fly at low altitude between the student dorms and residential districts of Musashino and Okutama. She used the pen in her hand to draw on the A4-size crop mark frame Magie Figur in the air before her. She drew a large speech bubble on the Magie Figur to create a megaphone.

“Please remain inside until you receive an evacuation order! The situation is different from last time, so please stay inside! You may feel the ship shake, but the internal frame will absorb it. Remain calm and wait!”

As her voice was amplified, she pulled a long paper list from her pocket. It contained student names and room numbers.

“Ah, I have to check here too. Let’s see, there are no pets, so that’s fine.”

She stopped her wings and descended in front of a room with a Japanese-style sliding door. As the ship shook, she could hear the shelves and glass containers within the room shaking. As Naruze listened to the noise, she checked the room number and the room’s internal control shrine located above the door. She then drew a new Magie Figur.

“ ‘Midair Standstill’. Given the consumption, I should use it at a concentration of 1/30.”

Inside the Magie Figur, she drew herself and Naito in midair staring at the setting sun.

“This is the spell from when we first flew up above the clouds. It hardens the air to create a barrier, but if it passes through the door and fills the room, the room’s air will harden and hold the objects in place.”

The Magie Figur glowed and the image within the frame automatically divided into panels and played out the scene of the two of them kissing. At the same time, the sound of the shelves and glass containers within the room stopped.

“Herrlich.”

As soon as the sounds ended, the two in the image stopped just before kissing. Naruze clicked her tongue.

“1/20 frames stops just short of the good part. I need to re-edit this at some point.”

Naruze nodded and turned around. She checked her list and began to head for the next room, but her wings stopped moving before she took off. She stared forward with a question mark on her face.

“Oh? Azuma? Are you done?”

Running toward Naruze was the person she had mentioned: Azuma.

Azuma ran toward her with a notebook in hand, but he frantically stopped when he saw her.

And when he saw the Magie Figur attached to the door, he quickly looked away.

“S-sorry! I didn’t see anything! A normal person like me didn’t see the inappropriate sight of a perverted girl posting a drawing of her relationship with Naito-kun all over the place!”

“Who are you calling perverted!?”

And what kind of normal person refers to himself in such an archaic way? thought Naruze, but she kept quiet as it was not her problem.

Instead, she asked, “Did you check the storage district below the school? We have to keep the cold room running, right?”

“Judge. Shirojiro-kun and Heidi-kun arranged for most of it to be taken care of, so it didn’t take long. They’re also working to purge the valuable goods and heavy transport ships and arranging to have them meet back up with us later. I need to get back to my room and check on Miriam and ???.”

“...What was that name you just pronounced?”

“???”

...Damn, this boy isn’t half bad. I need to use that in a doujinshi some time. Well, whatever.

Naruze passed by Azuma on her way to the next room and patted his shoulder.

“So you didn’t give that ghost girl to an institution. That was a good decision. After all, most of the institutions on Musashi are sponsored by the Ohiroshiki family.”

“Could you not speak badly about someone who had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the front lines?”

Which one of us is speaking badly about him again? wondered Naruze with a bitter smile.

“I never thought you would have a kid, Azuma. And I was thinking of having you leave her with us.”

“With you two?”

“Judge. We face each other in bed when we sleep, but there is enough space to leave a little room in the middle. Current technology makes it possible for Naito and me to have a kid without sex or having one develop outside the womb, but this would probably be enjoyable in a different way.”

Azuma tilted his head when he heard that.

“What is sex?” he asked.

Naruze shuddered and the six wings on her back trembled in fear.

...D-damn him! I never thought Azuma would cause this much fear! Is this the power of the imperial family!?

She regretted her lack of time. It absolutely pained her. If there had been time, she would have told him a mixture of truths and lies and used him as a guide for her doujinshi.

With that in mind, Naruze came up with a defensive statement that would prevent Azuma from asking someone else and learning the truth.

“U-um... Well, you see? It refers to when two people enter into a deep relationship. I’ll tell you the details later, but...um...it has a lengthy history and a lot of different techniques.”

“I see. So for example, when do you and Naito-kun do it?”

...This boy has calmly entered the lion’s den!

Naruze answered him as she started to grow flustered.

“W-well... Wh-when we get in a fight, I guess? Yes, we spend the night making up.”

“So getting along can make a baby?”

...If only it could! If only!!

As she silently repeated herself, Naruze feigned calm. She took a deep breath in her heart.

“W-well, if you take it far enough, yes. It can happen by accident, too.”

“I see. So you can get along by accident? I’m learning a lot. Technohexen really do know a lot.”

“Judge, judge,” said Naruze as she nodded and lightly waved her hands. She felt she was going to go crazy at this rate, so she thought of a way to change the subject. “About that ghost girl. Her identity is unknown, so you should be careful.”

“Eh? Are you saying she’s a type of evil spirit?” he asked with a frown and a harsh tone of voice.

He’s the real deal, was Naruze’s internal impression.

“That girl is semi-transparent, but how does she look to you?”

“Well, I can see through to the other side...”

“Yes, it’s the same for me. So be careful. And if you do realize something, speak to Asama, me, or one of the others. Even if you have a new family, you still need some caution and distance. And if nothing happens, that’s all for the better.”

Naruze took a step forward and realized she had forgotten to say something.

“And try to come up with a proper name for her at some point.”

Her voice was joined by a noise coming from the ceiling. The battle was still ongoing.

On the deck, the battle had restarted for some and begun for others.

Futayo stepped up onto the deck first and the assault unit followed after her and once more began their charge up onto the deck. Futayo began a swordfight with Takakane.

Takakane had placed his Testamenta Arma over his back and now wielded the long bat which functioned as a wooden batter’s mace. The weapon was longer than he was tall, but he swung it around in every direction and stopped the coming attacks with swift movements. Futayo sent out a rain of blows too fast for her to use Tonbokiri’s normal drive. The bat must have been made into a divine weapon because it emitted ether light and deflected her attacks. He was both fast and accurate.

...It is just as I read in this year’s national academy officer white paper!

He was more than skilled enough to be a vice chancellor. His position was higher than Tachibana Muneshige’s because he had a defensive technique that allowed him to fully defend against his opponent’s attacks. Futayo contemplated what the secret was.

“Is it how you hold that long weapon!?”

“That’s right. I’ve got a compact swing, a bunt, right-handed hitting, left-handed hitting, and plenty more.”

He would change his position in respect to the weapon and even swap whether he held it to the left or right. To speed up the process, he would even let go of the weapon to lighten his body.

“Y’know what? I can accurately bunt any ball. Back when I was aiming for a spot as a regular, I would practice every day by hitting balls numbering at more than five digits. And wouldn’t you know it? The next thing I knew, I could receive and deal with rapid-fire bullets and god of war attacks.” He let out a bitter laugh.

“Now that I’m a ghost, I’m not allowed to play in official games since they can’t tell if I stepped on the base or not. Even so, I still hit three thousand balls a day. My technique is to repel any and all attacks. It’s an understated and plain technique.” He deflected Futayo’s attack downwards. “But with me here, the others can score some points. That is how I fulfill my role as the ‘vice’ chancellor.”

As he spoke, Futayo avoided a metal ball that flew in from behind him.

She just barely made it out of the way due to Takakane’s bunt defense.

...That was because he deflected my spear downwards, wasn’t it!?

But that was not all. He could likely also control the direction. Just by making her fall forward, he had almost prevented her from avoiding that attack.

“Tch. So simply ruining your form and guiding you isn’t enough,” he said.

He would defend against everything that was thrown at him while leaving almost all of the attacking to his comrades.

He embodied the defense and assistance meaning of the “vice” of vice chancellor. While Futayo worked to take on an entire army on her own, he would support the whole and guide his army to victory. He did not stand out, but their victory was assured while he was there. Takakane was the vice chancellor and Tachibana

Muneshige had been the 1st special duty officer because Muneshige had shown his true skill while receiving Takakane's assistance.

That was why Takakane wielded that long weapon.

I am a vice chancellor as well! thought Futayo.

Futayo and Takakane exchanged a high-speed barrage.

“...!”

Futayo attacked again and again. Takakane had no weight on the back of his weapon, so he had to keep her from circling behind him. He constantly moved his feet around to hold the bat forward, left, or right and kept the exchange of blows directly in front of them.

“...!”

His defense is very dangerous indeed, thought Futayo.

It was a special method of defense. He would not always just receive the blow. He would also hold the bat in a two-handed bunting pose and drop his bat downwards just before her attack struck.

She almost dropped Tonbokiri a few times.

In the middle of her barrage of attacks, he would suddenly do that. It was simple, but she could not let her guard down.

His strategy was to win using defense. At the very least, he was the polar opposite of Futayo or her father. However...

“Interesting!!”

I am glad I left, thought Futayo once more. *There are powerful people in ways I never imagined.*

As the ether light of their weapons scattered through the air, Takakane opened his mouth. He formed a smile and let out a booming voice.

“C’mon, don’t lose your nerve now! Tonbokiri’s gonna cry!!” he said. “Then again, I didn’t think you’d be able to cut the power of a Testamenta Arma!”

“Yes,” replied Futayo honestly. “I did not think I would be able to either.”

At the command center, Neshinbara looked away from the sign frames. Kimi called out to him as she arrived to have some fun.

“Heh heh heh. Four-eyes, the surprise attack plan turned into a mission to rescue Naomasa, but was that cut an ad-lib?”

“Nn... I don’t know that much about weapons, but Tonbokiri’s cutting system cuts the target using the name it takes in. In that case, I figured it would be able to cut that existence...that is, cut the ether making up its existence.”

“Is there anything it can’t cut?”

“Have you forgotten you’re an example? It probably has difficulty with existences not well represented by their name or anything like a fog or magnetic field that will immediately fill in the gap even if it is cut. Also, the cutting power drops when working on multiple objects at once. If there are too many targets or the target is out of range, there’s nothing she can do.

“The ranged abilities of Logismoi Oplo and Testamenta Arma seem to mostly set up a barrier that fixes the effects inside, so they will collapse as long as she cracks the outer shell.”

Naruze had arrived at the command center and she spoke up while sending a few divine transmission texts to Naito.

“What? Who would have expected a liberal arts type like Velázquez would be on an athletic ship. The makeup of their team is not normal.”

“Judge. We may be exceeding human knowledge pretty badly, but their excitement isn’t normal either. I put together a new team, so let’s hope this will get us through.” Neshinbara sighed and wiped sweat from his brow. “We have a pile of issues to intercept. There are all sorts of things we need to prepare for and ready ourselves for. And to do that... Please, everyone. Endure this.”

As soon as he said that, he heard a metallic noise. It came from midair. Michiyuki Byakko had created an empty path made from ether light and had struck Jizuri Suzaku with its right arm.

The exchange of attacks lasted an instant.

After being knocked into the air by a shoulder charge, Jizuri Suzaku took a defensive pose.

However, Michiyuki Byakko stepped out onto the virtual field while surrounded by the *cadena firma* of its spell OS. The path the white god of war ran down was not surrounded by a wasteland. It was surrounded by the wheat fields that acted as the foundation of people’s lifestyles.

“Aren’t you going to bring out the Suzaku’s ‘swamp’? If not, I guess that’s a fake.”

As if to answer Fusae’s question, the Byakko’s right arm shot out in a straight line.

The instant the attack struck Jizuri Suzaku, Naomasa heard the sound of impact and saw a great number of sign frames appear around her.

They calculated the strength of the attack, gave the danger to Jizuri Suzaku’s durability, or posted alarms.

“An estimated power ratio of 5 times mine!?”

Naomasa gasped. That ratio could not be explained by a simple difference in speed. However...

“We haven’t been destroying the mechanical beasts of the New World simply for our own safety. As a technologically undeveloped country, we have been literally ‘hunting’ technology there. We’ve gotten some nice things.”

The white fist twisted around as it slammed into Jizuri Suzaku and the vermillion god of war let out a creaking noise. And...

“!”

The drive wires and joint preservation parts on the back of Jizuri Suzaku’s shoulders burst. Reddish-brown lubricant that resembled blood spewed out like wings.

Strength left Jizuri Suzaku’s arms and its body bent backwards from the impact. While stepping in midair, Michiyuki Byakko charged in and swung its left arm in toward Jizuri Suzaku’s gut.

“!”

Using the backwards-bending motion from the earlier impact, Jizuri Suzaku kicked its right leg up as a counter.

The clawed foot shot up toward Michiyuki Byakko’s jaw from below.

It should have hit.

But Naomasa saw Michiyuki Byakko draw out all of its power to force its extremely heavily armored body to move.

That’s crazy, thought Naomasa. You’re gonna fry the thing.

However, the Byakko succeeded in changing from its punching stance. It suddenly leaned its entire body forward as it ran.

The shimmering of heat rose from its white shoulders, waist, and back with as much force as its forward movement.

And it managed to duck below Jizuri Suzaku's raised leg.

“!?”

Michiyuki Byakko clutched Jizuri Suzaku's right leg as if carrying the leg over its shoulder.

Jizuri Suzaku would be carried away. While Naomasa was pushed back toward the air, she heard a voice.

“Left Shoulder – Single Roar.”

As Fusae spoke, Michiyuki Byakko's left shoulder was wrapped in the spell OS's *cadena firma* and it transformed. *Cadena firma* appeared by the dozen and the armor opened up. It connected to the god of war's back and arm just as its transformation finished.

“A tiger!?”

“This is a mechanical beast you won't find in the New World. This is standard equipment for Michiyuki Byakko and it's useful for striking fear in the hearts of the New World's mechanical beasts. It isn't as nice as a Logismo Oplo, though.”

Fusae gave a troubled smile.

“Do it, Michiyuki Byakko.”

A great roar exploded out and Naomasa felt her skin tremble.

“Jizuri Suzaku! Purge the right leg!!”

Her split-second decision saved everything. Just as Jizuri Suzaku opened a few sign frames and the right leg detached at the base, the leg held by Michiyuki Byakko was destroyed.

The destruction of that heavy metal leg was not so much a tearing or cutting as it was a shattering. Even the lubricant instantly dispersed and colored the air.

“This is the ether-inclusive ultra vibration destruction cannon ‘Roar Deterioration’. Contact is recommended and it completely diffuses at a range of about five meters, but it’s impossible to avoid entirely at close range.”

She was not lying. Despite purging the leg, a creaking vibration ran throughout Jizuri Suzaku’s body and the internal vibration caused lubricant to burst out from the back of the shoulders.

In front of Jizuri Suzaku, Michiyuki Byakko produced *cadena firma* and restored its left shoulder.

“Farewell, false Suzaku. As far as I can see, you don’t have the unique spell OS of the four sacred beasts and I detected no resonance. Here is one last parting gift.”

The Byakko continued running and used its right fist to strike Jizuri Suzaku while it was still in midair.

The impact ran through Jizuri Suzaku and its upper chest caved in. The vibration had tossed it into the air, but now it twisted around and fell toward Musashi. However...

“Well done, Naomasa-kun.”

A sign frame opened, and Neshinbara’s voice caused Naomasa’s eyebrows to rise and brought a smile to her lips.

Naomasa was unable to stop the momentum of the impact, so she could only continue to fall. She watched Michiyuki Byakko run by overhead.

“Instead of giving me paid leave from the engine division, treat it as a special case,” said Naomasa.

Meanwhile, Fusae turned around on top of the white shoulder.

“Falling from that height qualifies as ‘well done’? You don’t mean...”

“I have comrades and I managed to fulfill my role until they got here.”

Naomasa pulled a kiseru from her pocket and stuck it in her mouth. She looked toward the ship’s bow below her.

Two large towing belts were spread out between the first left and right ships. From her perspective, they were rotating forward. They were transporting a 100 meter long transport ship at high speed.

The transport ship was headed up in a shallow ascent that would take it to España’s command ship.

“It’s on a collision course!!”

The impact ran through the air as noise and the two ships shook as if they had been punched.

The flat bow of the transport ship crumpled in by a few meters as if it were made of paper and the front of the command ship’s deck ripped upwards.

That giant backup allowed the Musashi assault unit to charge forward onto the deck. A few tripped and fell due to the shaking of the impact, but they managed to form a shallow half arc around the enemy bridge.

The Tres Españan students spread out around the bridge to protect it.

The vibrations and shaking caused that metal field to rock as if due to slow waves. Between the two groups of students, Futayo and Takakane stood motionless with their weapons locked together.

With Futayo's cutting ability, Takakane and Velázquez could not use their Testamenta Arma.

Fusae was rushing toward the command ship, but she would be a few seconds late.

Musashi used those few seconds to begin a strategy they could use in that stalemate situation.

"I, Musashi Ariadust Academy Student Council Vice President Honda Masazumi, propose a truce so that we may question this battle!"

The slender girl standing on the front of the transport ship's deck held up her right hand as she made her announcement.

"This battle is based on a misunderstanding on Tres España's part, so it will benefit neither of us!"

The girl, Masazumi, began to explain why. The reason was...

...Tres España is attacking us because Musashi is transporting aid to England.

However, that only worked if Musashi really did trade with England. Musashi had the ability to trade, but it had yet to say it would assist England.

Masazumi saw Futayo move back from Takakane and jump toward her. Her announcement of an end to hostilities would be meaningless if one of their students was still engaging in combat. She had stopped speaking to wait until Futayo and the others moved back. She watched as they gathered in front of her and built a narrow formation.

Meanwhile, the enemy remained motionless. They did not know where this announcement was headed.

Finally, the white god of war jumped down from the sky and onto the center of the flagship's deck behind Takakane.

As Michiyuki Byakko threw itself down from the path it had created in midair, its weight caused the command ship to tremble. From the transport ship, Masazumi felt the vibration of the transport ship pressing against the shaking command ship.

...Most likely, the command ship is looking for a chance to retreat as well.

The attack had come to an end with this stalemate.

And in order to hold the enemy in check and make a show of force, Musashi had to show that they had the advantage.

...So...

Instead of speaking that word aloud, Masazumi took in a deep breath.

A presence appeared behind her and she heard the Tres Españans gasp.

She knew what had appeared behind her. A single figure had walked up the staircase to the deck. She recognized the quiet, powerless footsteps.

“Masazumi-sama, Horizon Ariadaust has arrived.”

Masazumi heard the speaker take a breath.

“To be honest, it is nothing but a burden, but I have the Logismoï Oplo ‘Lype Katathlipse’ with me.”

●Ship Classes●



Sis! Sis! Sometimes the inhuman people around me mention this interesting-sounding nerdy stuff about the classes of aerial ships! I hate being left out, so tell me what it means!



Heh heh heh. Humiliating brother, you don't really need to know this, but I will tell you the general divisions. It's mostly like this:

- ~12m: **Unclassified**
- ~36: **Wyvern Class**
- ~108: **Dragon Class**
- ~324: **Kraken Class**
- ~972: **Jormungandr Class**
- ~2916: **Ziz Class**
- ~8748: **Bahamut Class**
- ~Even bigger: **Leviathan Class**



The names of the classes come from the names of ships built during the Age of the Gods. Ships were mass produced based on those, so it was natural to name the classes after the originals.



Those names are just giving you images to picture their sizes with! In that case, couldn't they be called A Cup Class, D Cup Class, and so on!?



Since Musashi has been disarmed, it would be No Bra Class. At any rate, these names are only used now as a remnant of an earlier time. They do a good job of generally describing the size, output, types of weapons, thickness of the armor, and amount of equipment on board, so just hearing the class gives you an estimate of its war potential or transportation ability. The Tsrhc countries didn't like the idea of referring to their ships with demonic or monstrous names, so they mostly just use the length of the ship in meters. In general, the size triples with each class. Dragon Class is about the size of a single wide block on Musashi, so that might help you picture their sizes.



I've been thinking. Wouldn't memorizing these make it a lot easier to give a running commentary on things. You could say things like "What!? A Ziz Class!?"



You don't have any intention of learning this, do you?

Study:

Ship Classes

Toori: Nee-chan! Nee-chan! Sometimes the inhuman people around me mention this interesting-sounding nerdy stuff about the classes of aerial ships! I hate being left out, so tell me what it means!

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Chapter 05: Restraint from Every Direction

CHAPTER 5

"Restraint from Every Direction"



Where is the expectation
For quality of expectations?
Point Allocation (Top Performer)

Where is the expectation

For quality of expectations?

Point Allocation (Top Performer)

Masazumi looked over her shoulder at Horizon.

She was looking at everyone else, enemies included, more than at Masazumi.

“Why is everyone gathered here?” asked Horizon. “To be honest, I do not know what I should do in front of such a crowd. ...Oh, are you telling me to fire?”

“Our side is still on there, so don’t shoot!!” shouted everyone.

Horizon nodded expressionlessly and raised her right thumb.

“How do you like the grip I have on the crowd? I have determined this comes from the quality of my base ability.”

“Um, Horizon? ...Can I say something here?”

“Judge,” said Horizon with a nod. She walked up next to Masazumi and placed her left hand on her shoulder. “Okay, everyone. Listen up. Now that I have finished warming up the crowd, Masazumi-sama will say something amusing.”

Masazumi heard the sound “eh?” drop from the bottom of her stomach and down to the ocean below.

...Something amusing? Wait a second. I don’t know what to do. What kind of expression should I use here?

As Masazumi went over the different human emotions in her head, the Tres Españans exchanged a glance.

“ ... ”

She heard scattered clapping coming from the crowd.

...Th-they're expecting something terrible!!

She glanced over at the sign frame next to her face where Neshinbara's eyes were half-lidded as he made a gesture resembling stretching rubber out between his hands. They had not stopped their cruise toward England, so he was likely telling her to stretch this so they could approach England.

Then this is okay, I guess, thought Masazumi. Where is that idiot Aoi when you need him?

She recalled seeing him and Tenzou the messenger fishing through the goods left in the transport ship. She had heard Aoi say, "Oh! This is a vintage 'Divorced Wife Anne Boleyn'!"

However, the Tres Españans and even the Musashi students including Futayo were waiting expectantly.

...Is this an interpretation of the exchange of names from the Sengoku period?

And so Masazumi thought. She needed to say something amusing, but she had almost no knowledge in that regard. She thought about going with a Western-style joke, but that would be a disaster if she messed up the nuance. Finally, she went with a reliable option.

"O-okay, um... Let's get some help from the god of humor from the Age of the Gods."

Everyone nodded and focused on Masazumi even further. She silently told herself to calm down, took a deep breath, and spoke in as low a voice as she could manage.

"The year is 16XX! Earth is wrapped in the flames of the apocalypse!"

She nodded.

"Hello, I'm Utamaru."

The joke bombed.

In K.P.A. Italia, Innocentius had been watching the change using a sign frame, but he casually shut off the divine transmission.

In Musashi's snack shop named Blue Thunder, the customers stared blankly at the divine monitor and the female shop owner wordlessly rotated the device 180 degrees so the footage faced away from them.

In Musashi Ariadust's faculty room, Sakai continued with the shogi puzzle from the daily newspaper. Oriotorai turned a refreshed smile toward Sanyou who was flustered.

“Yakiniku! Let's go get some yakiniku!!”

The massive silence brought a sticky sweat out all across Masazumi's body.

...Oh, no! I shouldn't have done this. People expect something of me, I get carried away, and this is what happens! I had a feeling my life was always like this, and I was right!

Horizon silently placing a hand on her shoulder once more only made it worse.

Everyone in the crowd remained silent and expressionless, but after a few seconds, scattered applause started.

“W-wah! Stop giving me scattered sympathy! That hurts the most!”

She waved her arms in denial while holding the box to the cleansing toilet seat “Rapid Fire” she had frantically taken with her when leaving the elementary school. However, everyone had already begun folding their arms and tilting their heads while discussing why the situation had gone this way. Masazumi even saw some of them bring up sign frames and make posts on Musashi's divine network. Horizon on the other hand...

“Masazumi-sama, to be blunt, you should probably get to the topic at hand.”

...And who was it that stopped me earlier!? Then again, it was my fault for going along with it. The cause and effect here is like something from a Zen dialogue.

At any rate, Masazumi had to quiet everyone down, so she could not take the time to suppress her blushing.

“Um... Listen up, everyone! To get back on topic, we have no more reason to-
...”

Just as she was going to say “continue fighting”, Michiyuki Byakko’s arm moved and she heard two sounds.

...Eh?

Confused, she checked what the noises had been. The first was Michiyuki Byakko throwing something hidden at its waist by making a quick snap of its lower right arm and wrist. The other was the thrown object flying over everyone’s head with incredible speed and landing before her on the crushed bow of the transport ship.

An object had arrived directly before Masazumi. It had been thrown with the perfect timing to stop her ceasefire announcement. It was a person wearing vermillion. It was a short female student of Tres España with two false arms.

“Tres España’s Alcalá de Henares 3rd Special Duty, Tachibana Gin.”

With those words, she swung both her false arms. The hands held double cross-shaped swords equipped on the outer edges.

Her hat sat down too far to see her eyes, but her voice could be heard. She spoke while light came from the holy spell accelerator on the back of her neck.

“Prepare yourself.”

In an instant, the two swords on the right quickly stabbed toward Masazumi who stood perfectly still.

Masazumi had never experienced actual combat. She had been through something similar during PE classes, but she had never been faced with the combat speed of someone with actual combat training.

As the double swords flew toward her, the first thought in Masazumi's heart was...

...*U-um!*?

She did not know what to do, so she hesitated.

Meanwhile, Gin's right false arm held a double sword. It resembled two crosses attached side by side and Gin stabbed it straight toward Masazumi's chest.

Masazumi made a split-second decision but not because of her own will. She heard a dignified voice of someone accustomed to combat.

“Masazumi!!”

Futayo's cry brought Masazumi to her senses.

She checked her surroundings in an instant. Gin was coming in for the attack.

“...!”

Masazumi could not see Gin's eyes, but the Tres Españan girl did turn her head a bit toward Futayo on the deck.

That slight movement was a stroke of luck for Masazumi.

She needed to move out of the way, but she also needed to make sure Horizon evaded as well.

“Horizon!”

She swept her right hand back as if protecting Horizon from the danger.

However, her fingers tightly grasped Horizon's chest. The unexpected feeling of her hand sinking deeply into that chest completely surprised Masazumi. Both her eyebrows and mouth twisted into a frown.

“...Munyu?”

A groan not even she really understood escaped her nose just as the automaton spoke expressionlessly.

“Oh? I have determined Masazumi-sama has risen one step on the ladder of corrupt politicians. Is this because Toori-sama instructed you in the groping survey back in Mikawa?”

“Just get back!!”

The double sword arrived. Masazumi cried out and bent back as it mercilessly targeted her face. She instinctually held up Rapid Fire's paper box to guard her face.



ライオン
The Lion King of the Sky

For usage purposes, the center of Rapid Fire was open, so the double sword pierced straight through the paper box.

“...!?”

Masazumi frantically twisted out of the way of the double sword tip stabbing toward her. Rapid Fire was U-shaped and she held it diagonally, so Gin’s double sword was held from the left and right and could no longer move.

With the blades stopped a few centimeters from Masazumi’s face, she and Gin remained motionless.

Perhaps because her attack had been stopped, Gin clenched her teeth and let out a groan.

“So you had a sword breaker with you. I would expect no less from Musashi’s vice president. You were fully prepared for battle.”

“No... If anything, this was preparation for the battle one has every morning. Or maybe I should say for cleaning up afterwards...”

“Every morning!? Normal students going into politics go through morning training on Musashi!?”

...What? I think we’re talking about two different things now. Is this information going to spread to the other countries?

As Masazumi thought, shadows rushed toward Gin’s back.

They were the Musashi students who had formed an arc on the enemy ship’s deck.

“Ohhh!”

Normally, they should not have faced an opponent on Gin’s level. They were only attacking because Gin had her back turned. The large false arms attached to Gin’s shoulders were built for strength, so they moved in a straight line and could

be slow. While Gin was in a pose to attack Masazumi in front of her, it would take a moment to reach behind her.

The students held no weapons and for some reason had their fingers spread out like birds.

“Officially, anything we do is fair game!!” they shouted.

“That’s still a crime, you idiots!!”

Meanwhile, Gin pulled her double sword from the paper box. Masazumi frantically moved back, but Gin swung her heavy false arms back toward the students rushing in behind her.

“Silence. We are trying to fight.”

The giant wrists on the ends of Gin’s arms suddenly slid outward.

She did not swing the actual arm around. Instead, the wrists on the end of the lowered hands began to rotate.

“ ... ”

As the wrist used some kind of driving force to rotate, the double swords stabbed out into the air at several levels like she was weaving a design.

This was not a human motion. It was a mechanical motion only possible with her false arms.

And just as this mechanical action began at full speed...

“ ...!?”

She forcibly swung her arms around and swept away those charging toward her.

Gin saw the people around her flying away in the edge of her vision.

The two double swords and her false arms protected her by essentially creating a protective dome around her.

...I can create a wall.

To her, those arms were weapons. Just as swords and spears were weapons and were not a part of the human body, those false arms could not fully become a part of her body.

She now used them as her possessions.

She heard the sounds of the people she swept away falling onto the ship or hitting other people.

These are the sounds I heard long ago, reminisced Gin. I did not have these false arms back then.

It felt so long ago to her, but it had only been two or three years before.

To be exact, it had been two years and ninety-two days before. As her wrists returned to their normal location, she recalled the past following that time.

“ ... ”

A smile appeared on the corner of her lips.

...Yes.

She had felt unending contentedness in those few years. However...

“I might lose that...”

Gin looked forward where Honda Masazumi and Horizon Ariadust were rapidly moving away. Arms on the ends of chains had grabbed their backs and were pulling them toward the stern of the ship.

“Take this!!” shouted Nate Mitotsudaira as she swung two chains into the air from the stern.

Just as Gin wondered what was happening, she sensed a shadow coming from directly above. It belonged to a wooden container a dozen or so meters tall. It appeared to be empty, but the frame and outer walls gave it more than enough weight.

...Throwing something like that is just absurd.

As she thought, the massive weight dropped toward her.

Naomasa and Jizuri Suzaku had been lowered to the surface of Tama using one of the containers. She had met up with Asama and Noriki who were working on firefighting and repairs. The three of them saw it happen.

Using her Argent Chaîne, Mitotsudaira threw the giant container toward Tachibana Gin. When Asama saw it, she and Hanami raised both their hands.

“Kyah! She’ll be smashed to a pulp!!”

“Asamachi, are you enjoying this?” asked Naomasa and Noriki gave a nod with half-lidded eyes.

Meanwhile, a new action and noise occurred in the air.

There were two sounds. The sound of a cannon firing was followed by a sound of destruction. Then came the action.

“The container...”

As Naomasa and the others watched, the container was blown to pieces.

The container was completely smashed. The air and top of the ship were filled with a downpour of countless wooden fragments, loosened pieces of wood, and twisted or torn pieces of the metal frame.

A single space was untouched by this downpour. The rotating wrists of two false arms swept the container fragments away from that space. Gin stood in the center of it.

The silhouette of her body, false arms, and double swords were visible, but a new shadow had been added.

Two long cross-shaped cannon floated near her shoulders.

“Arcabuz Cruz. I pulled these from the two-pitch space of my false arms.”

The light of Testamento Firma spell smoke leaked from the ends of the cannons that were pointed toward where the container had been. Gin then turned them toward Honda Masazumi and Horizon Ariadust.

She aimed the two Arcabuz Cruz.

“Now then.”

But before she could fire, something arrived from her left in a flash. Someone unleashed a direct attack with a scraping speed rather than a tearing one.

“I, Honda Futayo, shall be your opponent!”

Gin reacted to the attack from Tonbokiri. She opened her eyes wide and brought Futayo into her field of vision.

“...!”

And she smiled. With her eyes still opened wide, the corner of her mouth rose, she deflected Tonbokiri with both double swords, and voicelessly rejoiced. Futayo corrected her stance in an instant and Gin aimed both cannons toward her.

“I will take back everything you stole from me!”

And she fired the cannons toward her enemy.

Gin's cannon fire acted as a signal and the battlefield began to move.

Footsteps, people's movements, the flow of the air, and the sounds of firing weapons shook the battlefield. While standing just forward of the center, Fusae noticed something different about the Musashi students' movements.

...They've split to the left and right while trying to have us push down the center?

Her gaze raced across the battlefield and she instantly grasped the overall flow of the battle.

"Everyone, fall back to port and starboard!!"

The track-and-field and baseball teams replied from the deck.

"Testament!"

With unquestioned consent, the vermillion Tres Españan uniforms moved with no confusion between male and female. The center split to the left and right as if a paper had been ripped down the middle. Something could be seen through the opening this created.

"The Logismoi Oplo 'Lype Katathlipse'!!"

Just as Fusae said, Horizon Ariadust was in the process of expanding the Logismoi Oplo.

...That vice president's negotiation was the key.

They had planned to use the Logismoi Oplo if the vice president's negotiation had not gone well.

Not a bad scenario, thought Fusae. That Logismoi Oplo is Musashi's greatest weapon and this is a good way to show it off to another country.

"But I wasn't opening up this space to let you fire it."

As she raised her right arm, Michiyuki Byakko raised its right arm as well.

“Ju! It’s your turn!”

As Masazumi supported Horizon, she saw someone new arrive on the scene.

A woman stood on top of the enemy ship’s bridge just in front of where Velázquez had been.

The long-lived woman wore glasses and an eboshi-style hat. Her armband said “Vice President Juana”.

According to Masazumi’s knowledge...

...She is the political and economic leader who supports Tres España. Also...

“She is one of the Eight Great Dragon Kings who uses a Logismo Oplo!”

“It is rude to refer to a Catholic by that name.”

Juana gave a thin smile and held in her right hand the giant weapon Masazumi had mentioned. It was a long sword. The sword’s black and white exterior resembled bone and it was two meters long, but she easily raised it.

“My Akedia Katathlipse is already ready to use.”

As sunlight poured down, several sign frames made of crosses could be seen around her.

On the other hand, Lype Katathlipse was still being prepared.

Juana held the long sword up to the right and slowly swung it down.

“Overdrive!”

As she spoke, its power fell upon the Musashi students.

The power that assaulted the Musashi students aboard the transport ship could be summed up with the word “restraint”.

The restraint took the form of rings of bluish-white light. Those rings of ether light were several centimeters thick and they suddenly bound the Musashi students’ bodies.

“This is heavy!? No, is this...?”

A ring wrapped around Masazumi’s chest like a sash and the light gave her a certain feeling.

...Is this Akedia!?

The restraint felt heavy, but it was not a weight pulling her down. It was a sticky weight keeping her in place.

Juana then spoke up to prove Masazumi right.

“This is the deadly sin of dejection. The power of dejection affects people in the parts of themselves that they understand to be evil.”

As if in response, the Musashi students began groaning as various restraints took hold.

It seemed all of them had something about themselves they felt bad about. As far as Masazumi could see, everyone had at least one place restrained and some people had several. Everyone tried to shake off those irremovable restraints.

“Dammit. Why is this how everyone has to find out it bothers me how my stomach sticks out!?”

“N-no! I really did go to Ueno! I-it wasn’t for your sake or anything!”

“U-um, my breasts don’t r-really bother me. Right, Masazumi? Isn’t that right?”

Don’t pass it on to me. But I guess this means it does still bother me, she thought calmly.

However...

“Horizon!”

Horizon’s entire body was almost entirely covered in restraints. They covered her arms, legs, waist, stomach, chest, neck, head, and even fingers.

“ ... ”

A ring of light covered her eyes like a blindfold, so Masazumi could only see her twisted mouth. However, her body was doubled over a bit and she could only move within the restraints made of light.

“You are an automaton who has lost her emotions. ... You must feel that everything about you is ‘lacking’.”

Juana’s words gave Masazumi a chill.

...Everyone has things like that!

Masazumi wanted to help, so she touched the ring of light binding Horizon’s hand which held the Logismoi Oplo. However...

“!”

As soon as she touched the light, a gasp of pain escaped Horizon’s mouth.

Masazumi’s hand jerked back and she felt sorry, but then she realized why Horizon had felt pain.

“Even if you can fool yourself, it hurts when other people touch on it, doesn’t it?”

This was the overflowing Akedia one felt for oneself. The things one could not help and the things one had hidden deep in their heart now became their enemy and bound them. And one could not hope for help from others because that would be the same as letting them know your faults.

“What are we supposed...?”

Masazumi heard a noise before she could say “to do”.

The enemy units had split to the left and right aboard Tres España’s command ship. Now, the batters from the baseball team spread out on top of an open lane. They fanned out and prepared for a concentrated attack while the Musashi students could not move properly. Masazumi could do nothing more than realize how bad this was which left her feeling inexperienced.

...What do we do!?

As she mentally groaned, she saw Juana raise her left arm.

She was giving the batters their signal to attack.

But before she could, Masazumi, everyone around her, and all of the Tres Españans saw something. Someone stood next to Juana on the roof of the command ship’s bridge. It was Aoi who had his arms folded while completely naked.

Every single person was left speechless, but Juana had not noticed Aoi.

Masazumi’s mind was unable to react, but her body honestly began to sweat worriedly. Velázquez’s eyes opened wide as Aoi tiptoed by with short steps. Aoi went on and stood right next to Juana.

However, Juana nodded because she still had not noticed him.

“Fi-...”

She swung her left arm down at exactly the height of Aoi’s crotch.

“Waaah!” screamed Masazumi and everyone else.

Hearing them, Juana frowned, stopped moving, and tilted her head.

“What is the matter, all of you? Why make strange noises in the middle of battle?”

Fusae frantically spoke up.

“U-um, Ju? You should... You should probably check behind you.”

“Eh?”

Juana turned to her right and looked over the shoulder of the arm holding her Logismo Oplo.

“There is nothing there,” she said after a few seconds.

“The other side! The danger’s on the other side!”

“The left?” Juana tilted her head. “But I am using Akedia Katathlipse and our side is not affected by it. Well, if you think it is dangerous, I have no choice. Excuse me, secretary, please stand back.”

Juana slowly swept her glove-covered left hand backwards.

“Ah,” was all anyone could say before Juana’s left hand firmly grabbed at Aoi’s God Mosaic as he stood with his arms crossed. She must have felt something as her hand sank rather deeply into the God Mosaic because Juana frowned.

“...Eh?”

She looked to the side and Aoi nodded with his arms still folded.

“Oh, too bad. That’s my ‘real version’.”

Hearing that, she looked down toward her hand, saw the God Mosaic she could not see past, and took a very, very deep breath. While she reacted, the idiot continued speaking.

“I like high places, so I happily climbed up to the roof. I’m glad the effect of my stealth tools didn’t wear off partway up. Now that would’ve been embarrassing! Right!?”

The naked boy directed that last question at everyone present and then turned toward the dumbfounded Velázquez.

“Oh, you’re the president of Team Velázquez! I buy a lot of your porn games! I thought a mosaic tile pattern was best for skin color, but your realistic coloring is great too! Just the title of The Surrender of Breda stimulates the imagination, don’t you think!?”

“O-oh, I see you have an eye for this. But I’m trying to make art, so keep that in mind.”

“Okay! Now, you there. Could you give me that Logismoï Oplo? I’m willing to take it for free.”

Juana’s reaction to his offer was a bit delayed.

She finally looked back down at the location of her left hand.

“Kya...”

“What do you mean ‘kya’? Is just holding it not enough? Here, how about this?”

“Kyaaaaaaah!!”

Juana screamed and instantly and unhesitatingly knocked the idiot from the rooftop and into the air.

She then swung both fists straight down.

“Fire!!”

At the same time as the naked boy was launched into the air, a dark figure suddenly appeared from the open hangar hatch below the bridge. He wore a Musashi student uniform as a ninja outfit and wore a hat deep over his eyes.

“I, Tenzou Crossunite, have used plenty of stealth ninja techniques to steal all sorts of information! Ha ha ha!” He laughed and spread his arms out. Something stretched out between his hands. “Look at this long scroll printout. It’s filled with Tres España’s wartime secrets! Who would think everything was prepared as a diversion to allow me to steal Tres España’s secrets just before we escape using gravitational cruising? Just out of curiosity, where is Toori-dono? He was using stealth techniques along with me earlier.”

A naked boy fell into the arms holding the scroll. The document itself was ripped to pieces which scattered into the sky. The impact of the naked boy’s fall forced Tenzou down into a sumo wrestler crouch, but he somehow managed to bear with it.

“Nwohhh! A-a naked person just fell from the sky!? Nwaah! I went to a lot of trouble to get those secrets! And this is Toori-dono! Nnn, the first time I carry someone in my arms and it’s a self-deprecating naked boy!? Am I cursed!? I am, aren’t I, god!? Cancel this! It doesn’t count!”

A notice from Tenzou’s contract shrine opened next to his face.

“That request is outside my jurisdiction : By, god.”

“Dammit. I just saw the dark side of these contract-loving shrines! Isn’t that right, Toori-dono!?”

“Hey, hey, listen, Tenzou. Isn’t that woman a complete monster to knock me off like that?”

“Y-you aren’t even listening!!”

“Neither are you!?” shouted everyone.

The Musashi students suddenly realized something: the restraints were gone.

When Juana had pushed the naked boy off the bridge roof, she had let go of her Logismoï Oplo.

“ ... ”

Everyone fell silent and looked back toward Horizon Ariadust. She held her Logismoï Oplo up like a wall, stuck half her face out, trembled, and stared at Juana and Tenzou with the whites of her eyes visible on the bottom.

“Y-you thieves! ...How was my artificial jealousy?”

“Just fire already!!”

In the next moment, great power erupted between the two ships and the powers crossed paths several times.

What came first was a black line shooting out straight ahead from Horizon Ariadust’s Lype Katathlipse. That line could be called the harbinger of the Logismoï Oplo’s tearing.

The line extended approximately three kilometers and Tres España’s command ship existed near the very beginning of the line.

However, Fusae gave an instruction before the tearing exploded out.

“Descend straight down!”

The command ship forcibly lowered its altitude, but its bow could not lower because it was digging into the transport ship. The command ship ended up tilting backwards.

And something shot by on a straight line toward the back of the tilted deck.

This figure with six golden wings was Margot Naito. She straddled a *Schale*-covered broom and shot full speed toward the two boys standing in front of the bridge.

In an instantaneous movement, Tenzou hopped onto the back of Naito's broom while also tossing Toori into the air. Naito then caught Toori with her broom. However...

“Ohhhhh! Gold Mar! The broom is sticking up between my legs into my crotch!”

“That doesn't matter and we need to get going!”

As Toori bent up vertically, Naito caught him over the nose of the broom while they moved diagonally upward at high speed. Naito used seven acceleration spells at once and the needles of seven speedometer-style Magie Figurs swung fully to the side.

“Herrlich!!”

With a roar, they shot up above everyone's heads.

In the next instant, four decisions were made to prepare for the instant after that.

First, Velázquez and Takakane reactivated their Testamenta Arma.

Second, the Musashi students activated defensive spell shields.

Third, Tres España's baseball team began their bombardment.

And last, Fusae's Michiyuki Byakko and Gin ignored the black line of light coming from Lype Katathlipse and charged forward.

They charged directly forward along the path of the Logismo Oplo. Of the two who made this decision, Gin swung her two double swords backwards as if they were wings.

“Here I go!”

After those few preparations were made, the preparations were used against each other.

First, the Musashi student's activated their defensive spells which produced shields. However, the activation speed depended on an individual's ability to operate and prepare the spell, so Velázquez and Takakane's Testamenta Arma activated before all of them had finished.

The two Testamenta Arma named Crus Temperantia – Novum and Vetus had the ability to halve speeds and divide power by number of uses.

But the Musashi students thought they could still defend even with their speed lowered. They thought they could make up for the halved defensive strength with how they held the shields and by doubling up the shields.

Tres España's baseball team then began their bombardment.

The batters' attacks focused on strength, but the pitchers were different. They used precise control to attack within the gaps between the shields. They mostly focused low and aimed for the defenders' crotches as they crouched down.

“...Fgh!”

More and more defenders fell to their knees as if their teeth had fallen out, and holes opened in the front line.

However, Horizon fired an attack to support them.

“Solid Emotional Expression : Overdrive : Output : 60.”

“...!!”

At an emotional expression level of 60%, countless numbers of tearing power shot out across the weapon's range of three kilometers. It shot by around the black line which had been sent out first to reserve a spot. Those on the command ship moved toward the bridge in the back so as to avoid the line. However, the tall bridge was still in range.

A great tearing power was produced.

It took the form of black claws. Due to the Testamenta Arma, the massive amount of claws made of black light had their speed halved and strength divided by their number.

Even so, it was enough power to destroy the command ship's bridge.

Two great forces shot toward it.

One was Gin whose double swords contained ether light, whose false arms swept by, and who fired her cannons. The other was...

“Go, Michiyuki Byakko!”

Cadena firma expanded around both shoulders and Fusae fired ultra vibrations over Gin's head and by either side of her.

Ether light-covered double swords, cannon fire, and ether-interfering ultra vibration destruction cannons that used the same system all struck the countless tearing claws.

The attacks hit.

While faced by the slowed and weakened tearing claws, Gin swung her body a bit to the left and right and made sure the trajectory of her false arms and double swords was not thrown off.

“...!”

She slashed and produced destruction from the clash of ether with ether.

“...”

Black and pale white flowers blew through the air around Gin. Her swords flew along continuous arcs that created countless flower petals of light. The heat from her false arms produced a shimmering which danced around her.

However, that was not all.

Both Michiyuki Byakko's shoulders had opened into lion faces and the black and pale white light scattered into a mist around its arms. That mist produced a storm that wrapped around Fusae and Gin.

This ultimately produced a mountain wind of light and darkness. As if riding that wind, the girl with the two double swords created more blowing flowers and fired her cannons repeatedly.

"Is this working!?" she asked while looking forward.

Their dance of wind and destruction had produced a single effect.

They had gouged out a large hole in the central bottom portion of the tearing claws shooting forward.

The tearing was headed toward the bridge, but Gin and Fusae had opened a space.

"The port and starboard divine transmission church towers have been damaged!" shouted a voice over divine transmission.

However, the next statement gave the overall conclusion.

"Also, the central bridge is undamaged!"

A cheer rose into the air from the Tres Españan students.

As if to amplify their joy, an especially large blizzard of flowers and storm of mist came from within the black tearing.

That was the last attack. Gin and Fusae's defensive attacks had bought enough time for the ship's tilt to take it out of range of Lype Katathlipse. The wind and blizzard made of light danced through the air, and the black wind gathered together and disappeared.

A girl and a white god of war stood within it all as if brushing aside that wind.

“Sigh.”

They were so filled with exhaustion and injuries that even a quiet sigh could be heard.

The two double swords had all broken as if bitten off partway down. The false arms, the pair of cannons, and the white god of war's armor all had claw marks gouged out of them. No part of them was unharmed. Michiyuki Byakko had been able to protect Fusae because the damage had come from ether, but some claw marks were visible across her body as well.

However, both Gin and Fusae still had strength left in their gaze. They sweated, they panted, and their hair was in disarray, but they did not lose sight of their opponent.

“Everyone, attack!!” shouted Fusae.

Tres España's bombardment and charge began once more.

However, the following transmission brought everyone to a stop.

“Musashi is switching to gravitational cruising!! Over.”

The very next moment, Musashi's giant form vanished, transport ship and all.

“...!?”

The large-scale air pocket created by such a massive object moving so suddenly slammed the command ship and other ships into the air.

Gin's eyes saw everything that happened during that high speed turn of events.

...They are going to depart.

She looked forward as her mind raced to find a way to stop the leaving transport ship and Musashi, but Fusae spoke up behind her.

“Everyone, gather in the center of the deck!”

Gin understood what Fusae meant. The severity of a ship’s shaking would be smallest in the center. Fusae likely understood what was coming next, but Gin did not care.

“...!”

She took a few steps forward, but something happened as she tried to advance.

Musashi suddenly moved away.

The atmosphere shook and Musashi’s high speed movement created a vacuum. This produced a mist in the air and a great roar. The departing vessel was already too far to reach by running. Musashi Ariadust Academy should have been directly below, but Gin only saw its back and the stern of the ship growing more distant.

“...!”

Gin fired a volley with her two Arcabuz Cruz.

The shells tore through the atmosphere as they flew in two straight lines for the transport ship being towed away. They pierced the raging atmosphere and mist, and reached the transport ship. One shot dug into the towing belt pulling the transport ship.

The other was on its way to strike the enemies gathered atop the ship, but Gin heard a single voice just before it did.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!”

That voice which reached Gin through the wind caused the shell to explode.

The destruction called in more mist and wind and Gin faced her enemy through the white swirling wind.

This enemy was Musashi Ariadust Academy’s Vice Chancellor.

“Honda Futayo!”

They were too far apart for their attacks to reach, but they could see each other. The other girl’s gaze seemed to produce noise and even pain, but Gin could not look away.

But it only lasted an instant.

Musashi quickly picked up speed, produced a massive steam explosion when it struck the atmosphere, and moved further forward.

As she was left behind, Gin felt a mixture of regret, anger, and hatred sink into the bottom of her gut.

“——!!”

She let out a wordless cry just before the command ship shook violently from the air current produced by Musashi.

Azuma felt the ship shake especially hard just as he arrived back at his room.

The reverberating noises had grown more distant and were now mostly made up of sporadic loud noises, so he guessed the battle was already coming to a close. It had been a mistake to go around to see if anyone had not yet evacuated to their homes.

...I’m not a combat member, so Miriam is going to be mad I’m not getting back until the battle is already over.

He knew she would start by demanding to know what he had been doing. He knew it could not be helped, but the notebook under his arm felt oddly heavy.

The notebook contained notes on the day’s lessons for Miriam. The girls would take the notes and Miriam had two notebooks she would alternatively give one to them or receive one from them. Today, Naomasa had taken the notes and it described Ohiroshiki’s execution with angular writing and diagrams. Azuma

wondered if the vector arrows and output calculations on the diagram of the enema being injected were out of habit due to her occupation.

They had only had the first and second periods that morning and most of it had been spent on the execution, but it must have had some meaning to Miriam who spent all her time in the room. And for that reason, Azuma resolved himself as he arrived in front of the room.

...I need to go in before I hesitate.

He opened the Western-style sliding door and entered.

He brought himself inside the small room and immediately heard a voice.

“Nooo! I’m going out!!”

He looked forward and saw a girl in a wheelchair and a white, translucent girl struggling in the first girl’s lap.

“Out! I don’t wanna stay in!”

Azuma grasped the situation in an instant.

Oh, she wants to go out and Miriam is stopping her, thought Azuma. He then added, *She really is a mother.*

Meanwhile, Miriam held on to the girl.

“You can’t! It is dangerous outside right now! Are you going to disobey your mama!?”

“I don’t wanna!”

This is complete mayhem, thought Azuma.

He then opened his mouth with absolute confidence.

...I'll use a technical term to sound really cool as I tell them to get along.

“S-stop that, you two! Let's calm down and have sex! C'mon! Hurry up and have sex! As the papa, I will watch over you and make sure you can do it!”

“...Azuma?”

For some reason, Miriam looked as if cold water had been thrown on her. The girl stopped struggling when she saw Miriam's expression.

“Umm? What was that? Could you say it again? I think I misheard you.”

“Eh?”

“Well... It's just that I thought you were a serious person, so...I'm pretty sure that was a mistake. Could you say it again?”

“Judge. What I mean is, you have to have sex, don't you?”

Does Miriam of all people not realize she was instigating one side of the conflict? wondered Azuma as Miriam's face grew more and more red. Is she embarrassed because she realized how immature she was acting toward a child? She really is an adult if she can honestly admit her mistake.

And so...

“Miriam, you are an adult, so you know what to do when having sex, don't you? That girl is still young, so make sure you teach her.”

“N-no, um...Azuma? How can you say that to a Catholic girl? No, wait...that isn't what I meant. Um, where did you learn that word!?”

Miriam's reddened face and raised eyebrows told Azuma she was angry. However...

...What I'm saying is right, so why is Miriam angry with me?

One possibility did occur to him. Miriam was Catholic and he had been taught that word by a Technohexen. Historically, Technohexen had been rejected by Catholicism.

...It would only make this worse if I told her Naruze taught it to me.

With that in mind, he kept his answer ambiguous as he told her where he had learned that word.

“Just now, I...had a girl I know teach me about sex.”

While holding the girl, Miriam bent back and took a deep breath.

What is it now? wondered Azuma as she shook her wheelchair forward.

“Oh? Judge, judge. And while everyone else was fighting? Ohhhhhh?”

...Oh, no. Should I not have said it was a girl? I can't have her making any misunderstandings about this.

“Oh, s-sorry! But the girl who taught me about it is already committed to someone else.”

“Ohhhhhhhh!?” Miriam bent back again but quickly straightened up. “Y-you’re skipping way ahead here! Reverse adultery!? So wh-who is this girl!?”

“Well, I can’t exactly tell you. But the person they are committed to is another girl.”

Miriam shook slightly and the veins visible on her forehead grew denser.

“...Miriam?”

“Mama, are you really fired up?”

“Th-that is fine. Y-yes.” Miriam averted her gaze and trembled. “I-I knew this was a virtual family, but I-I never thought it was a family where the father would be stolen by a lesbian... Heh heh...heh. This is just like some kind of trap. Was

this entire family a trap? Heh...heh heh. Ah hah. What is with this sense of humiliation!?”

Azuma could instinctually tell this was very, very bad. He did not know what, but he had apparently angered Miriam by making some kind of serious mistake. Azuma frantically thought.

“S-sorry, Miriam! I understand I did something wrong, so let’s hurry up and have sex!”

The wheelchair slammed into him at high speed.

The sky rushed by around Musashi fast enough to be visibly noticeable. Tension still covered those on the deck of the transport ship being towed by Okutama.

They had begun healing or providing first aid for the injured students, but the tension remained in those for whom this had been their first battle.

“N-no! I didn’t mean to! I thought you needed a cardiac massage and acted without thinking. Um...It was my hands fault! My hand!!”

“Okay, that leaves a lobotomy as the only option!”

Inexperienced mistakes such as that were happening frequently.

“Horizon!” shouted Toori as he joined the group.

Horizon was limply being held by Masazumi. The uninjured or lightly injured students saw Lype Katathlipse dropped at Horizon’s feet while Horizon herself was very weak and had her eyes closed. However, Toori ran over as quickly as he could while still naked.

“Horizon!”

Everyone’s expression clouded over when he simply called out her name. He may have been naked, but they were still worried about him.

As Toori approached, Horizon suddenly opened her eyes. Her gaze held no strength, but she still spoke weakly when she saw Toori.

“Toori-sama...C-could you come closer?”

“Wh-what is it, Horizon!? Do you have something to tell me!?”

For some reason, Toori wiggled around as he ran over with his arms outstretched to embrace her. Horizon slowly stood with a lowered center of gravity and threw a counter into his crotch using her tightly clenched right fist.

With a dull sound, Toori’s waist jerked back and his knees collapsed underneath him. The other boys gave shrill gasps as they saw it, but Horizon remained expressionless.

“I insist that you put on some clothes. What if you catch cold?”

“I don’t get why you punched me!!”

Horizon nodded and wiped her right hand on Masazumi’s coat, causing the other girl to shriek.

“Judge. It is within the margin of error for a warning.”

At that point, her energy must have run out because she closed her eyes and passed out.

Horizon went limp and Masazumi had to support her once more. Meanwhile, Toori was down on both knees with his legs turned inwards. As everyone turned sympathetic looks his way, he slapped his stomach as if trying to bear with something.

“Nnn... Unfortunately, I didn’t use my boke spell because this was a serious situation... I just can’t let my guard down around you, Horizon! You are a worthy opponent!”

“Why are you acting like some kind of military commander? And you really should put on some clothes. Also, um...”

Masazumi laid Horizon down, took the end of a rope connected to the railing along the edge of the deck, wrapped it around Toori's neck, and had him sit like a dog.

"Okay, okay. I'll stay. ... Wait, Seijun! What is this? Naked with a rope is one you don't see every day. And wait, is this a square knot!? Seijun, you really are bad at this."

"Shut up. You stay here until the ship comes to a stop. You'll get in the way otherwise."

That blunt statement led Toori to collapse sideways onto the floor while still naked. Masazumi ignored him and looked around.

"If anyone needs to be transported, quickly prepare them for transport. I'm also worried about Horizon. Mitotsudaira, can you transport people with your silver chains?"

Mitotsudaira shook her head while wearing her blue personal clothes.

"With the height difference, there is no way I can reach. I think it would be safer to wait until the gravitational cruising is over and use the towing belt to bring us alongside Okutama or one of the other ships." Mitotsudaira looked down at her disheveled clothes. "But this battle gave us a lot to consider for the next battle."

"Judge. It did and I'm sure the others down below agree. But..."

Masazumi looked over at Rapid Fire's paper bag on the floor next to her. When Gin had removed her double sword, the contents had broken. It was clearly no longer usable.

"I have to thank Tres España for doing this during the warranty period. Now I don't have to demand they pay for this next time we meet."

As Musashi cruised in a straight line at high speed, damage occurred in several places on the ships.

This damage was not caused by the atmosphere, the wind, or the shaking of the ships.

“Asamachi, can you hear me? It’s Heidi. According to ‘Musashi’, the areas with a weak ether supply are in trouble because they have surpassed what their buffering can protect them from. The surface is being treated as roughly as the outer walls, so be especially careful there. I’m on my way around with Shiro-kun. ...Oh, and pass this on through the communication network.”

Wearing her uniform, Asama nodded in response to Heidi’s sign frame.

“Understood. I will go around to them all as well. I will be working on tuning the ships after putting out the fires, so call me if you need anything. Okay, um... Hanami?”

Asama looked out across the streets of Oume which was smoking after the fires had been put out. She then gave a few instructions to Hanami.

She looked over a stack of divine messages Hanami had automatically produced.

“Um, Hanami? Just because everyone calls them that does not mean you have to address the messages to ‘cruel bastard-sama’ or ‘flat chest-sama’. Also, ‘die’ and ‘go to hell’ are not proper greetings.”

The people around me are so outrageous, thought Asama just as a nearby building began to groan.

Musashi was shaking as it flew at high speed and low altitude, and shocks would occasionally run through it like a vehicle running over a stone, but this groan was caused by something else.

...This is due to inadequate ether supply caused by the gravitational cruising.

In gravitational cruising, the space in which Musashi existed was brought under the influence of special directional gravity acting in the direction Musashi was to travel. Simply put, Musashi alone would “fall” in that direction.

...The basic elements are to produce the gravity source and to specify Musashi as the only target to be pulled by that gravity. Also, there is the ships' internal gravity control to protect the people and objects aboard.

To ensure they did not destroy the surrounding environment, buffering had to be set up against the movement of the atmosphere created around Musashi.

According to what Asama had learned in middle school, the shockwave of the ships' high speed movement would shake buildings on the surface even at an altitude of 5000 meters. Even over the ocean, it would cause massive primary and secondary damage to aquatic resources and cause changes in the weather. And whatever damages were caused, Musashi would be the one blamed on the political and trade fronts. These buffering spells were used even during normal cruising and they acted as the foundation of Musashi's defenses while cruising.

...But they need to be strengthened during gravitational cruising, so the fuel economy gets really, really bad.

“The ether supply within the ship is thrown out of order, so buildings and sections can be destroyed.”

To provide protection during gravitational cruising, each section of Musashi had spells carved into the structures, keystones, and primary pillars. When supplied with ether, those spells would protect the buildings, sections, and people, but the protection in some areas would weaken when the shaking and creaking prevented the ether from circulating properly.

A spell user like Asama was needed to provide adjustments.

“Beginning performance.”

Asama spoke up, reached for the bow named Kataume at her waist, and attached charms to the string.

After attaching around seven charms on either side of the string, she plucked the string and a high-pitched noise rang out.

“Clap.”

The trembling and groaning of the surrounding buildings and floor grew stronger, but gradually disappeared.

Several small forms appeared from behind buildings and within the seams between sections on the ground. They were small spirits produced by the ether disturbance. Their vague outlines formed circular, plantlike, humanoid, or animalistic shapes.

Asama saw them looking around the area with their sensory organs.

“The disturbance has been temporarily settled, but a lot of them showed up. We don’t have to supply ether during gravitational cruising very often, so you can really see where the ether has built up.”

From the clouds flowing by in the sky, it appeared they had reached their top speed. According to “Musashi”, they could continue gravitational cruising for 32 seconds. They would use that time to reach a high speed and then cruise on inertia. They would shift the produced gravity over to keep their altitude fixed and the output would instead be used to protect the ship and those aboard.

Several of the small spirits with large heads pulled out something hidden behind a nearby water bucket. Asama checked the B5 sized object which was tilted in her direction.

“The R-rated porn game Captain Magellan’s Surprising Tropical Heaven? Actually, I think he really did end up in heaven. ...Anyway, why did you hide this here, Toori-kun?”

She was blaming someone without proof, but she was certain it was him. Most likely, he had either had no more room at home or something else had come up on his way home after purchasing it.

However, that was not something that should be out in the open, so she admonished the spirits and put it back.

“I hope the spirits don’t make that their home...”

Just as she began imagining a dark future, a torii-style sign frame appeared showing the city message board.

“This is ‘Musashi’. The gravitational cruising acceleration has finished without issue. We will now transfer to inertial cruising and head straight to England. I will contact you again once it is safe to exit to the surface, but you may move freely throughout the underground and residential areas. Over.”

That message from “Musashi” prompted Asama to look ahead to the east. She saw something in the distance.

“Is that...?”

A giant shadow floated in the sky like a black mountain.

It was England.

“We can now visually detect England. Over.”

While making various arrangements for arriving at England, “Musashi” looked forward.

England was a vast mass of land floating above the ocean. It looked bluish-black, the land resembled upside down plates overlapping each other, and the underside’s silhouette looked like a collection of stalactites.

...England is a floating island nation. It is thirty-one kilometers from north to south, thirty kilometers from east to west, and four kilometers top to bottom.

Just like Musashi, issues concerning weight distribution and warping were solved by not making the land from a single rock. Instead, countless crusts were intertwined as a spell movement structure. These structures then formed four levels from top to bottom and four blocks. Musashi would stop at the land port at the mouth of the Thames, but it would first circle the entire floating island once to both lower its speed and allow England to check that Musashi was disarmed. Simple trade would be performed at the same time, so it took three days to ultimately enter the Thames.

However, thought “Musashi”.

Even if she was deliberately lowering their speed in inertial cruising, they were still cruising at greater than 120 knots. Musashi was over seven kilometers long on average, but it still travelled the distance of its entire length in about two minutes.

They were already less than forty kilometers from England, so it would only take a dozen or so minutes to arrive. That bluish-black island’s structure grew more apparent and its forests and cities became visible.

However, there was a problem.

Musashi’s speed was not dropping fast enough.

Our only option is to drop our speed while circling England. Two wide revolutions will be necessary, concluded “Musashi”. The simple trade will not be possible.

Meanwhile, a few ships appeared in the sky near England.

England sent out a maritime pilot to lead the way and a few escort ships. Musashi’s bridge raised a flag requesting a maritime pilot.

“Musashi will now enter England’s territorial waters. We plan to cruise around England to lower our speed, so we will follow England’s guide ship around England. Over.”

At the same moment, a divine voice transmission arrived for “Musashi” over the common divine network. A few sign frames appeared, all with their borders formed with the crosses that indicated Protestantism.

“Notification for Musashi of Far East’s Musashi Ariadust Academy!” said a low female voice.

The notification came from a high-speed crayer already turning to come up alongside Musashi’s starboard side. The crayer had several cannons on either side, its high-speed spell sail stuck forward like a spear, and it drew an arc through the traces of the waves in the sky.

However, the next voice contained a sharp tone.

“This is the escort ship Granuaile belonging to England’s Oxford Academy. I am the captain, Grace O’Malley of the same academy. I have a warning as one of the Fairy Queen’s Trumps!”

“We order you to immediately stop your ship! You have already entered British territory, you are in a battle-ready state, your relationship with Tres España and the Testament Union is unclear, and no cooperation has been established between England and the Far East! If you do not stop immediately...” The speaker took a breath. “England will stop you by force!!”

Immediately afterwards, “Musashi” saw four figures jump from Granuaile and onto the tip of the starboard ship Shinagawa. Those figures all had human form and four shoots of ivy rushed from Grace’s ship to guide them.

“ ... ”

The anti-wind spells and inertial buffer control were pierced and destroyed wide enough for people to pass through.

The destruction produced a low-pitched sound similar to cloth being whipped by strong wind and it was followed by repeated sounds of splintering wood. In an instant, the inside of Shinagawa's buffer control was dyed white by fog.

“We are under attack! There are four enemies! I have identified them!”

“Shinagawa” sent out a ship-wide broadcast.

“They are from the student council and chancellor's officers of England's Oxford Academy. They are from Trumps!”

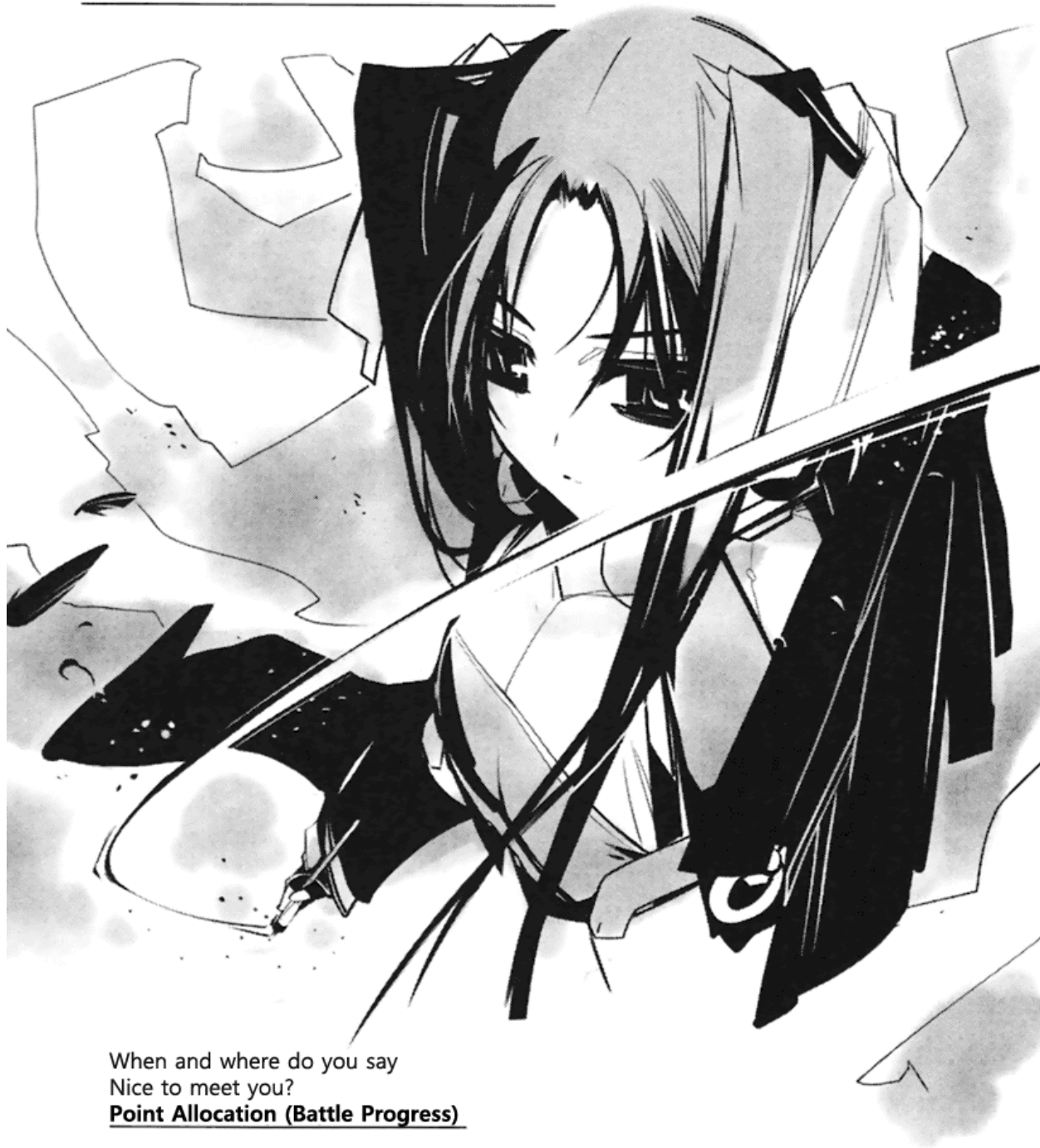
There were only four of them, but they were the top-level people who supported an entire nation. And Musashi had to confront them.

“All who are able to face them, please prepare for battle! Over!”

Chapter 06: Greeter on the Deck

CHAPTER 6

"Greeter on the Deck"



When and where do you say
Nice to meet you?

Point Allocation (Battle Progress)

When and where do you say

Nice to meet you?

Point Allocation (Battle Progress)

Someone on the towed transport ship groaned in response to “Musashi’s” request to prepare for battle.

Naito turned toward the bow.

“The problem is where the battlefield is. The bow is almost completely abandoned.”

“Judge,” replied Mitotsudaira with a nod. She turned her golden eyes toward Musashi. “Who will make it to the bow!?”

The transport ship was being pulled by the towing belt in the air behind Okutama. A glance into the sky reminded Mitotsudaira of this fact and she clenched her teeth.

Musashi’s primary combat force had gathered on the transport ship to fight back against Tres España.

Former guard unit member and current vice chancellor Futayo, special duty officers Tenzou and Naito, Mitotsudaira herself, and chancellor and student council president Toori were all there.

...And most of those down below are supporting members.

“I am heading down!”

“Please stop. I have determined you will not make it in time. Over.”

As Mitotsudaira began to run, “Musashi’s” face appeared in a sign frame.

“Pourquoi!?”

“Judge. The ship cannot be stopped immediately yet will paradoxically arrive very near England in about three minutes. If England can stop us in that time, that is fine. If we can stop them for that along, that is fine too. The time limit is a mere three minutes, so you will not arrive at the bow in time even if you begin now. Also, your transport ship is being provided with buffering control distinct from Musashi’s. Heading here will result in removing or even destroying a portion of that. Working to control and protect the transport ship after that will delay our approach to England. Over.”

“Then...”

Just as Mitotsudaira began to speak, a new sign frame opened. This torii-style frame displayed Neshinbara.

“Then we have only one option: use those on Musashi to oppose England. That’s all there is to it.”

Mitotsudaira watched Neshinbara sigh in the sign frame.

“You have no choice but to leave this to us for the next three minutes. Could you focus on aiding the injured on the transport ship? Whether those injured can stand or not when you return to Musashi will change how the people view this battle,” said Neshinbara expressionlessly. He looked around at all the people on the transport ship he could see. “Sorry. A lot of people were injured.”

Those words worried Mitotsudaira. As a knight who was expected to take part in combat, she understood what role a strategist bore.

...This will only get worse for the strategist.

They had endured the attack, but it had resulted in a lot of injuries. The city had been damaged, some areas were no longer functioning, and cargo had been lost. Blame would be turned toward the student council and chancellor’s officers at the

top, but the most blame would fall on Neshinbara who had given the instructions and authorization.

Every member of the main force on the transport ship understood this, so Mitotsudaira exchanged a glance with Masazumi, Futayo, Naito, and the others before turning back to Neshinbara.

“It is not yet time for the strategist to apologize, is it?” asked Mitotsudaira with a bitter smile.

Letting her worry show at this stage was rude to the strategist and a knight needed to show trust in her strategist.

“Once all of this is over, we can have a small victory celebration and meet up with England. That will give us an excuse to make up for the injuries and damage.”

“I see you knights love your glory,” commented Neshinbara while smiling bitterly.

Mitotsudaira suddenly noticed the background behind him was moving.

“Neshinbara? Don’t tell me...”

“Judge. I’m heading out myself. Bertoni-kun wants to have some fun, but he has his hands full dealing with the commerce and industry groups. And in a direct confrontation, I don’t have to worry about giving instructions to so many people.”

“But...”

Mitotsudaira wanted to say it was dangerous, but he cut her off.

“You understand, don’t you? We were attacked, people were injured, and the city was damaged. Unlike the Battle of Mikawa, we didn’t gain anything, so people are going to be wondering what the strategist was thinking. I need to do my best as the strategist. I need to show them I gave it my all so we could pull through to the end. I want to avoid having the student council and chancellor’s officers

criticized because of me. We're on our way to England which has a neutral relationship with the Far East, so I want to rid us of as much uncertainty as I can."

He took a breath which developed into a long sigh.

"Three minutes is a long time."

A sign frame emitted light within a vast white sanctuary.

Someone sat at the top of the carpeted stairs leading up to the altar in the back.

"What is it, Innocentius? And after I went out of my way to bring the large and small metal balls."

The elderly demon wearing a black uniform looked over at the Papa-Schola who also wore a uniform.

"Just as I was growing bored with the dull direction things were headed, something even less interesting happens," said Papa-Schola Innocentius. "You heard that, didn't you, Galileo? The emergency broadcast went out to everyone with an official post."

"Yes, it seems England has gone out to intercept Musashi. It only just happened, though. As an excellent student, what do you think of England's actions?"

"England has decided to show a more conservative face to the other countries," said Innocentius.

He watched a sign frame showing Musashi and England in the distance. The footage was being recorded from the north coast of Hexagone Française. Booths were being set up to sell food to onlookers as a male Hexagone Française student began to speak. He wore the armband of the Catholic joint divine transmission organization named Divine Correspondence.

“Oh, look at that! It seems several people thought to be from England’s Trumps just boarded Musashi! The War Commentator Club provided the following report on those who boarded Musashi: their ages range from child to elderly; their sexes are male, female, and maybe something else; and their combat styles or offensive or maybe not. ...Okay, can someone please execute the idiot who wrote this!? Anyway, over to the broadcast room!”

“I don’t see why they would board them. Hm?” muttered Innocentius. “Well, England had two options. One was to hold the Testament Union in check by accepting Musashi, clear the armada battles with ‘interpretations’, and work to resolve the Apocalypse along with Musashi. If they chose that path, they would not need to divide their exhaustion and war expenses between this and the armada battles. Then they could use the Apocalypse resolution to their advantage during the Peace of Westphalia. England could take the lead in bringing about the independence of their Protestant trading partner, Holland. Their influence in the Testament Union would have risen dramatically and they could have become a leading world power.

“However, England chose the other option. They are treating Musashi as an enemy of the Testament Union and reliably reproducing history by refusing their entry. If they do not disobey the rest of the Testament Union, the other countries won’t interfere or pull any unnecessary ‘interpretations’ during the armada battles and the Peace of Westphalia. They may even try to help England out some. Instead of aiming for excessive gain, they chose the reliable route. England may have the Logismoï Oplo of greed, but they’ve managed to restrain themselves this time.”

“But what led them to make this decision?”

“It was Tres España’s attack on Musashi. Musashi opposed the Testament Union, and Tres España chose to respond with an attack. In that case, what is England to do as a member of the Testament Union? If they protected Musashi, they would be making an enemy of every other Testament Union nation. And if England hadn’t intercepted Musashi, Tres España could have sent in their main force to scout out England’s strength and warn them that they were now the Testament Union’s enemy. England would have been charged with a crime and attacked

before they had a chance to make any kind of excuse. And as long as Musashi stuck around, Tres España would have continued hounding them. At any rate, England can no longer act as an intermediary between Musashi and the Testament Union. Carrying out the attack so close to England rather than to the west of Tres España gave England less time to make their decision. That was probably Vice President Juana's idea. The long lived race is a little too clever, don't you think? Hm?"

Innocentius turned toward the sign frame. Musashi had already grown more distant, but something else had happened as well. The first starboard ship was wrapped in fog and that fog could be seen moving even from this distance.

"Well, even if Tres España's attack brought this on, England must have resolved themselves to carry out the armada battles soon. If they want to go the reliable route, they'll want to keep the adventures to a minimum. It's probably due to how difficult it is to find a reliable path through these troubled times that no country wants to take any major steps toward resolving the Apocalypse. At any rate, now that England has made this decision, they must be planning to tackle the Apocalypse problem on their own. I hear England is performing research into the Apocalypse.

"Today, Tres España used Musashi to show off their strength and to display their loyalty to the Testament Union. And now England has displayed their own loyalty to the Testament Union and exhibited their intent to remain on the reliable path. As a man heading toward the Apocalypse, that is reassuring to hear and it is amusing to see them use Musashi as proof of their loyalty. Of course, it is always possible England's hostility and refusal to accept Musashi are just for show, but the other countries are likely already working to pressure England away from that."

"...And have you already done so?"

"Do you want me to say testament?"

"Testament," said Galileo with a nod.

Innocentius laughed.

“We can’t let up. M.H.R.R. is preparing a Far East force and gathering strength toward the east. But even if we’re busy dealing with that, we still have to do what we can here as the Testament Union,” he said. “But England needs to execute a certain royal before the armada battles can begin. They need to execute Mary Stuart who attempted to assassinate Elizabeth. According to the history recreation, she is Catholic, the former queen of Scotland, and Elizabeth’s cousin. She had a close relationship with Felipe II, the leader of Tres España, so her execution was one of the factors leading to the armada battles.”

“But that Mary is in a complex position for England.”

“Yes. She has a double inherited name with Elizabeth’s older half-sister Mary Tudor, aka Bloody Mary. This Mary represents England’s ‘unfaithfulness’.” He took a breath, looked at the screen, and continued speaking. “England is prepared to start a war by executing a royal and Musashi is opposing them. Now that is a scene you never would have imagined not too long ago, hm?”

Suddenly, a noise burst from the sign frame.

“Was that...?”

An explosive noise reverberated through the sky as Musashi grew more distant.

“Did that do it!?” cried a girl with six black wings.

Large wooden containers covered the floor of that storage district at the front of the first starboard ship Shinagawa. The black-winged girl, Naruze, wore the armband of the 4th special duty officer. She held up her Technomagie pen and faced forward.

A storm of steam produced by her attack rose where the enemies had stood a moment before.

As soon as she had arrived on Shinagawa's deck, she had made a surprise attack before even looking at the enemies.

The attack was recent enough that she could not see her enemies through the steam.

Naruze used the short time until that steam cleared to check her surroundings.

An archery unit stood behind her, but...

I shouldn't expect them to be able to shoot someone if I ask them to, thought Naruze. They aren't like Asama. No, I suppose Asama technically isn't like that either. But she did suddenly start shooting people at our elementary school entrance ceremony.

The tradition was to hold a festival after the ceremony where the upperclassmen and their parents or guardians set up stands.

There had of course been an archery stand. Asama had been urged to play because they assumed a shrine maiden would know how to use a bow, but that had been a mistake. The upperclassmen and adults had been amused by how well the daughter of the Asama Shrine could shoot, so they had made the targets more distant and smaller. As Asama had continued to nervously hit all of the targets, focus on her had grown and her anxiety had reached its max.

"Okay, now let's try some moving targets! Can you do it?"

That comment had been the biggest mistake of all.

Asama had been so nervous that she had started shooting everything in motion around her. The long combo she pulled off had turned the festival into a disaster. Ultimately, it had been the fault of the upperclassmen and adults egging her on, but Naruze still remembered running away from Asama, who Naruze had not known at the time, as she had targeted Naruze's back. Naruze had later asked Asama why she had done it and Asama's answer had been "I was nervous, so I wanted to end it all as soon as possible."

...Yes, but I think you were trying to end more than just the archery, you stabbing shrine maiden.

However, Asama was not here. Once she gained her qualifications as a shrine maiden, she had been banned from shooting people. She would still playfully shoot her comrades, but she was not generally permitted to seriously shoot people. The restriction was due to the fact that the power of a god's servant was meant to be used for purification. Probably.

At any rate, Naruze prepared her next spell.

The foundation of Technomagie spells was preparing internal Auspuff, but that Auspuff was then broken down into ATELL units. The creation of spells required formulas and a focusing device to influence the appropriate space. In some cases, a catalyst was also needed. Naruze went over the basic formula.

...To apply a change over one cubic meter for one second, I need 10 ATELL.

This was the smallest expenditure unit to operate a spell and each additional change added 10 ATELL. And each other factor included was another value needing to be added or multiplied in.

The rules governing the addition and multiplication of changes did not always match up with the physical laws and they could even change based on one's level of understanding of the space the spell was acting on. But despite those difficulties, understanding those rules was what it took to perform magic.

Well, a lot of the knowledge can be troublesome, thought Naruze as she held up a bottle filled with water.

The bottle held a liter of water and she used her pen to draw a water thermometer on the bottle's surface. To draw was to create. It could give life and it could take life away. The result of the spell she applied to the object she drew on was the same thing she had thrown before.

“A steam bomb using heat!”

Heating and acceleration were the specialties of Weiss Techno.

The steam from the previous spell began to thin.

However, she could clearly see the silhouettes of the people beyond it.

The enemy was there and they were approaching.

Naruze did not know if the previous blast had been effective at all, but she completed the second by using her pen to add red to the water thermometer.

As the color vigorously rose up along the bottle, Naruze threw it underhanded.

She targeted the silhouettes approaching through the steam before her. Not even she knew the exact timing, but once the water boiled and turned to steam, its volume would explosively expand. The bottle would compress it and finally burst, sending shards everywhere.

“Herrlich!”

Steam spread out over a large area and dampened the movement of the wind.

After the burst of steam, Musashi’s movement caused it to move toward Naruze and the others as it gathered together. But Naruze received this rough, heated air with her wings rather than her skin.

“How about that!?”

She received a response from the comrades behind her rather than the rough steam-filled wind ahead. She heard victorious cheers as the groups waiting behind her began to move forward.

They all seemed impatient to achieve some great deed themselves.

“L-leave this to Musashi Ariadust Academy’s Body Building Research Group ‘Gol☆iath’!”

“D-don’t be ridiculous! This is a job for the Greek Sun God Research Club ‘Helio-ga-balus’!”

“No, the Buddhist Research Group’s Warrior Monk Unit ‘Buddhist Sentai Mikkyoger’ will handle this!”

Shut up. I hope my Weiss Techno kills all of you, thought Naruze as she prepared her next spell with half-lidded eyes.

The steam cleared up as if splitting down the center and a voice came from within it.

“Ohhhhh, dear. Do we only get the one opponent?”

A few figures stood approximately fifteen meters away.

There were four of them.

...They’re unharmed!?

The steam explosion should have sent fragments flying everywhere. From as close as they were, they could not have evaded it, but the people standing there were unharmed. Also...

“There’s something wrong with them!?”

The person standing closest to Naruze was a very thin woman with giant metal balls chained to her legs.

Her flesh seemed to have been scraped away, her body seemed made of withered branches, and she wore heavy makeup. England’s female uniform was wrapped tightly around her and her right hand was lightly held up with palm out. She trembled, but her face twisted into a smile.

“I am one of Trumps’ 10s and Oxford Academy’s Vice Chancellor, Robert Dudley.”

Naruze had heard of them. The group that protected Elizabeth, as well as the entirety of England, went by the name Trumps and even had their own divine website.

The historical Robert Dudley was the cornerstone of the army and rumored to be Elizabeth's lover, but he had left the political world due to suspicion in a murder case. So in England...

...They gave the name to a woman to avoid that confusion.

"Then that person behind you is...?"

The figure seemed to nod. Standing behind Dudley was someone a head taller than Dudley who was quite tall herself. Also...

...She's round.

It was a woman shaped like an egg. She wore England's female uniform like an eggshell.

"One of the 10s. Vice President. William Cecil."

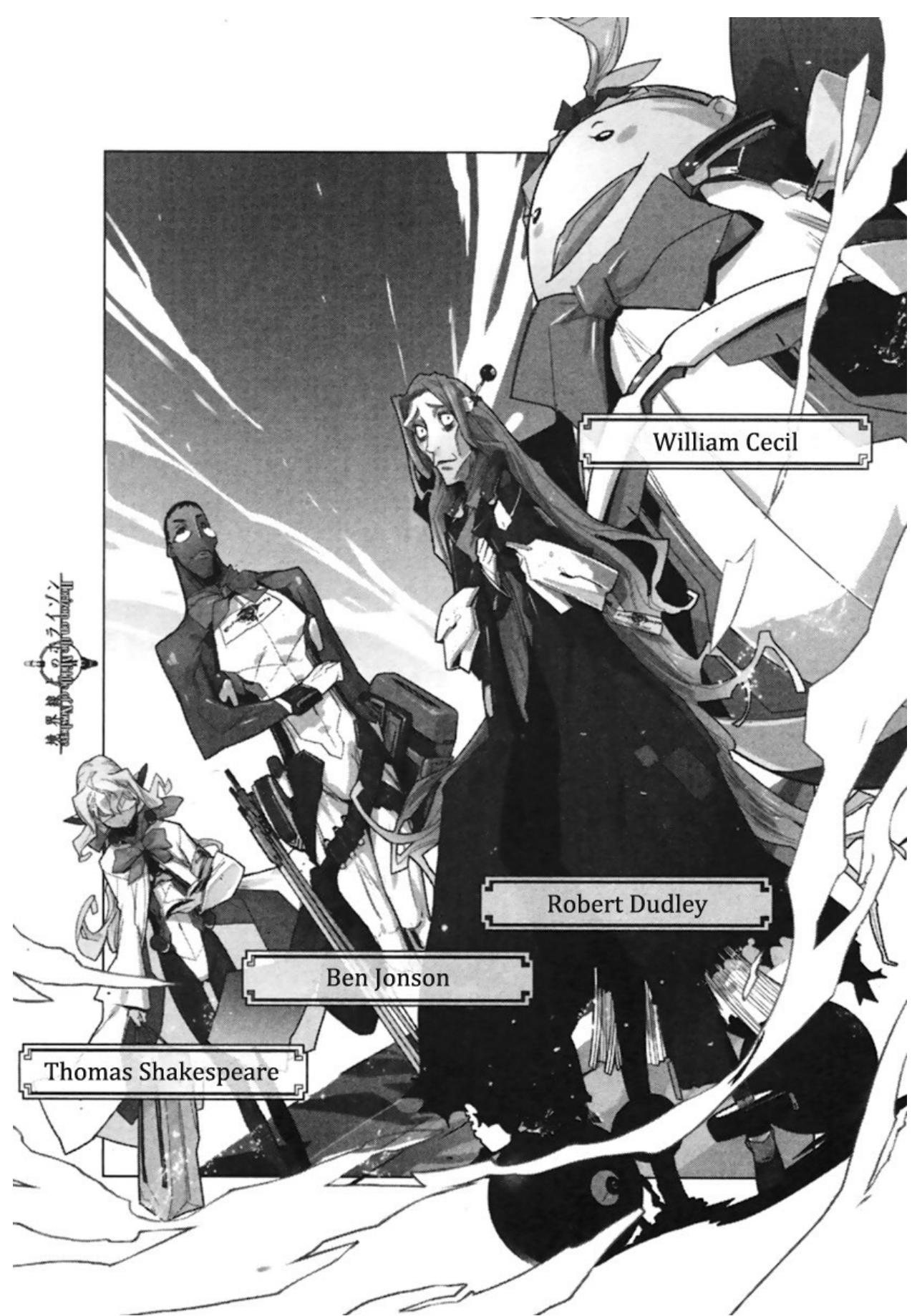
She gave each statement slowly as if having trouble breathing.

Next, a man with black skin stepped forward next to Cecil. He had a slender yet well-trained body, wore a white tank top on his upper body, and had two long, narrow cases hanging down from his waist.

Naruze recognized him. Anyone involved in modern cultural works would recognize him. He stared at her through his glasses and noise sounded from the printing incantation devices attached to the bottom of his shoes, but Naruze spoke up regardless.

"I never thought the leader of England's cultural clubs, the athlete poet Ben Jonson, would be here."

"You. Trumps was my idea, so I want to be involved as much as I can. And today, I have brought this treasured girl."



William Cecil

Robert Dudley

Ben Jonson

Thomas Shakespeare

“Judge,” said Naruze with a nod.

She then turned to the girl standing behind Jonson.

...An otaku. No other word would fit

The girl seemed to have the long ears of the long lived race, her hair was tied casually back, and her bangs were long. Her glasses hid her face, she wore the uniform suit with no skirt below a white coat, she wore sandals, she wore a backpack over her back, and she carried a paper bag.

“You would never think she’s Shakespeare, England’s most famous author.”

“You. Does the charm of the real deal surprise you? Jewels are meant to be kept tucked away in boxes, are they not?”

As Jonson spoke while taking some light steps, Shakespeare stared down at the paperback book in her hand and occasionally muttered something. Naruze on the other hand waved a hand to those behind her.

“Stay back.”

“Eh?” they all asked.

Naruze responded without bothering to turn around.

“That group includes one of England’s Testamenta Arma users and their Logismoi Oplo user.”

Just like Tres España, they likely intended to use Musashi as a stage to show off their strength. In which case...

“We need to make sure we don’t end up being the underdog. Trainers would use weak underdogs that could not even fight back to give their fighting dog confidence, but what do you call them if they can and do fight back?”

“O-oh? If you fight back but still lose, doesn’t that just make you a loser?”

Dudley held out her right palm and began to move forward.

However, someone else stepped forward first.

“Here I go...”

It was Cecil. Despite the great size of her round body, her gait was light and silent. However...

“...!?”

Shinagawa violently shook and everyone toward the front of the ship was slammed to the deck in an instant.

Chapter 07: Creators on the Battlefield

CHAPTER 7

"Creators on the Battlefield"



When one creates
Does one build up?
Or does one shave away?
Point Allocation (Molding)

When one creates

Does one build up?

Or does one shave away?

Point Allocation (Molding)

Naruze questioned the sudden shaking and weight that came down from above.

...What kind of spell is this!?

The pressure from above had to be some kind of spell. Naruze's pen was a spell focusing device as well as the summoning device for the Weiss Fräulein which was her spell tool as a Technohexen, but the Orei Metallo on the tip of the pen was dyed in red light. That meant the pen's ether analysis defense spell had automatically activated.

While the others collapsed to the ground or to their knees, Naruze resisted the pressure and thought about the enemy's spell.

What was this weight she felt?

Some power was affecting her as if pressing down from above. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see those behind her collapsed or kneeling, but one fact held true for all of them.

...Their hips fell first, so they landed on their knees.

She then focused on the pressure she felt on her own shoulders, head, and wings.

“Gravity has not been increased. Is every surface facing the heavens being ‘crushed’ from directly above!?”

As if affirming that analysis, the four British students other than Shakespeare stepped forward.

Naruze folded her wings to either side to divert the burden on her back to the left and right.

“Everyone, stand as vertically as you can! If you cannot manage standing, kneel on both knees and straighten your back! Focus on using incantation spells! Aim any projectiles above their heads!”

As she spoke, the weight only grew.

What kind of spell affects an entire area like this? wondered Naruze as she looked forward.

The four standing before her showed no sign of bearing the weight. However...

“God’s divine protection.”

Cecil was floating. Her arms were extended to the side and she lightly swayed in the wind.

“It can’t be...”

Naruze felt the pressure increase and Cecil floated up even further, so Naruze shouted out.

“That woman is ‘handing out’ her weight, isn’t she!?”

“Testament,” said Dudley with a nod. “H-historically, William Cecil was the queen’s Secretary of State and her good friend, but the stress of being envied and his hard work led him to regularly overeat. He became mocked as England’s representative of obesity. H-his may be an honored position, but the men backed away due to the dishonorable treatment. That is why she, England’s greatest competitive eater, was recommended. Her ability is...”

The lipstick-colored lips on that withered face formed a crescent moon. At the same moment, Cecil spoke in a chirping voice from over a meter above the deck.

“The wealthy should give alms to the needy.”

“No, thank you!” shouted Naruze.

Dudley moved forward while holding her right palm out in front. Her footsteps rang loudly as she moved closer.

“Oh-oh-oh dear. How can this fallen angel say that when she is so n-n-n-needy. Especially in the chest. Y-you should at least accept the weight any normal woman would have. Or is that enough to make you unsteady?”

“Kh! Th-that doesn’t matter!” Naruze raised her voice as her entire body trembled under the great pressure. “And I can embrace Margot and bury my face in her chest like this, so it’s perfect if there’s a little extra room here!”

As Innocentius listened to the voices picked up by the Hexagone Française broadcast committee’s parabolic microphone, he wordlessly closed the sign frame and turned to Galileo behind him.

“Okay, let’s get to Pisa like we planned. I bet we’ll scare some people throwing those balls down. Hm?”

“You need to grow at least somewhat accustomed to Musashi’s performance style, former boy.”

Back on the transport ship, everyone turned toward Naito as they focused on Shinagawa via sign frame or sight.

“Oh, my,” said Naito while scratching at her head. She put on her usual smile and said, “I can’t exactly bury her face in my chest even if she embraces me, so we don’t do that.”

“Y-yes, of course. Y-you do not do that, right?” said Mitotsudaira who was unsure what to say.

Naito nodded and said, “Right. It’s impossible with clothes on, so we don’t even try.”

“You mean you do it while naked!?”

“Well, um...”

Naito tried to laugh off everyone’s comment, lightly embraced her broom, and stared forward. Her eyes narrowed as she looked toward Shinagawa which was still wrapped in mist.

“But Ga-chan looks pretty irritated. I hope she doesn’t do anything reckless. She can get really, really reckless when she does.”

With an instantaneous movement, Naruze threw a new water bottle. She “replayed” the spell from before and threw it once more, but it required over twice the ether because the defensive spell protecting her from the pressure was still active.

She targeted Dudley who was now less than ten meters away. It was a short distance, but the weight caused the bottle’s trajectory to drop. Naruze had aimed well above the woman, but it flew toward her stomach.

“How reliable. According to our information, you are from M.H.R.R. and you certainly have that feel to you.”

As she spoke, Dudley’s opened right hand flew.

Immediately afterwards, a sound of impact was followed by a steam explosion.

However, something odd happened around Dudley’s right palm.

“You repelled the explosion!?”

It had been a casual action. She had swept her hand as if sweeping trash from a desk and the explosion itself had been pushed away from her palm just like a piece of trash.

“!!”

The explosive noise was repelled and Dudley and the other three were unharmed.

Naruze, however, shouted into the steam explosion which was brushed to the side.

“Is that the ‘Repel’ Testament Sign!?”

“Y-y-y-yes,” rang Dudley’s voice. “We are to brush aside any difficulty.”

I see, thought Naruze.

This was the ability to repel any power, but all it could do was repel. To use it as an attack, it had to be slammed into the floor or wall with a quick snap. The burden from Cecil was of course meant to hold their enemy down, but it would also automatically slam that enemy to the ground if Dudley merely knocked them to the side.

...So if these two are working together...

“Qu-quite the clever fallen angel, aren’t you?” muttered Dudley, cutting off Naruze’s thoughts. “A-a-anyway, w-w-we don’t have time, so let’s keep this short. I wanted to show I could make it through without using this. I had hoped to be praised by Her Majesty the Queen, but at this rate, I will not even be praised for stopping Musashi.”

She held her left hand up so it crossed her right hand. That left hand was decorated with a hard object.

“Th-this is one of England’s Testamenta Arma, the great gauntlet Brachium Justitia – Vetus.”

Naruze saw a giant silver gauntlet on Dudley's left hand. It was wrapped in bluish-white light in a pattern that resembled feathers and that light trailed after the gauntlet as it moved. A few crosses contained in boxes appeared on its surface and it wholeheartedly worked to make its presence known. Finally, Dudley raised the gauntlet in front of her chest.

"Wh-wh-wh-what do you think of this? One of England's Testamenta Arma is pretty r-rare, don't you think? And the power granted by the Brachium Justitia – Vetus is..." She pointed the gauntlet toward the floor. "...remote control of the battlefield's weapons. As a Testamenta Arma, its effective range is not as large as a Logismo Oplo, but it still works over several dozen meters."

As Dudley spoke, Naruze heard countless noises.

Many archers around her had been crushed under Cecil's weight and they had all held bows and arrows.

...They're turning toward me!?

"Do you get it now?" said Dudley. "R-r-r-right now, you are a hostage."

"...!"

The word "humiliation" floated up in Naruze's gut. She heard the straining of drawn bows behind her as well as the voices of those holding the bows.

"My hands..."

They could not let go of their weapons. Out of the corner of her eye, Naruze saw everyone moving to take aim. And it was not just the bows. The spears, swords, and everything else were pointed her way as well.

"Kh!"

One person allowed Cecil's weight to crush her down onto her bow. However...

...It's still aiming this way and she can't let go?

Several female students allowed themselves to collapse, but they grimaced when they realized their bows and arrows were being drawn even tighter than before. They gave anguished groans and shed tears.

“N-Naruze-sama, I-I’m sorry! What am I supposed to do if I end up killing you!? Then you couldn’t draw any more of ‘Asama-sama Shoots’ featuring Asama-sama and Suzu-sama!”

“What!? Whaaat!?” said Asama over a sign frame. “Why Suzu-san and me!? I thought Naruze only drew guys!”

“The guys are my trade. This is for the money.”

“No, it isn’t.”

That final comment may have been spoken using male language, but the voice belonged to a girl.

Behind Jonson, Shakespeare sat in her white coat and with her backpack sitting next to her. She spoke with her face buried in a paperback novel.

“Malga Naruze. You aren’t the type to create something for money.”

Naruze heard clear-toned male language come from Shakespeare’s lips.

“Malga Naruze, you are the head of Musashi Ariadust’s manga research club and have gone by the penname of Black Hair & Wings. You use romances that transcend gender to illustrate your primary theme of physical interactions being a means of accomplishing mental interactions. That theme has not wavered whether the characters are original or based on real people. In other words, drawing people regardless of their gender is your *Fides*.”

“Oh...?”

Naruze began to mentally sweat as Shakespeare began reading once more without even looking over at her. This sensation could be described as a slight chill, and there was a good reason for it.

...Black Hair & Wings was my penname in elementary school.

“Oh, right,” said Shakespeare as if she had just remembered something. “I pray you will eventually be able to draw the perfect form of your *Fides* that uses you and your partner as the model.”

“ ... ”

Naruze felt herself give a hard gulp.

...I hadn't even told Naito I wanted to draw that someday!

Naruze felt something a bit different than simply having a secret exposed. This was something she had not told anyone. It could only have been read in the foreshadowing of what she was doing with her current works.

Naruze did not know if this was her opponent's intention, but she felt this was a method of “unbalancing” her. And so Naruze spoke into the sign frame which had opened near her face.

“Asama, how about we make a virtual experience doujinshi using spells? By using coordinate gravitational control, we could even manipulate things inside people while not hurting them. And if you have a partner, it could be made mutual.”

“Sh-shrine maidens don't do that kind of thing.”

“Don't be stupid. That's why you make it an unofficial doujinshi. Asama, listen to my speech carefully: If you join, you can start with things that are more elementary. And as a club, you can make the excuse that it's part of school. We'll make sure to give you a grand entrance. You can learn a lot and it will make a nice break from the shrine and all its ceremony.” Naruze gave a small smile. “I know. How about we call it ‘What I Want to Do’?”

The sign frame silently disappeared. Meanwhile, Dudley stopped at five meters away.

She looked over and sighed.

“I-I-I see your pointless chatting is over. In that case, I have a demand for Musashi’s officers and student council.”

With a smile on the corner of her mouth, Dudley opened that mouth. Instead of looking toward Naruze, she turned her sharp gaze toward Okutama in the distance.

“A-a-a-acknowledge that Musashi is now under England’s full control.”

Place Musashi under England’s control.

Naruze’s mind jumped up at those words.

...Don’t be ridiculous!!

However, she also heard something else. Some solid mass struck the deck to her right.

At the bottom of her vision, she saw one of the water bottles she carried for spells. It was meant to be made into a steam bomb, but it should have been nothing but a water bottle as long as she did not put a spell on it.

But something was wrong.

She frowned as the water inside the bottle began to bubble.

...It’s started to boil!?

Before she could wonder why, Jonson shrugged beyond Dudley. He took a light step and the printing incantation device installed in his shoe printed a letter.

However, this letter was not printed on the deck. It was driven into the air and was wrapped in ether light.

This was a spell.

“Ah.”

He leaped into the air, swung his arms to his chest, and lightly spun a full 360 degrees.

“Heat dances through the water while its heart is trapped in a cage.”

As he spoke, he typed the same words into the air using the soles of his shoes and the number of bubbles in the bottle increased. Jonson landed and spoke without typing the words.

“You, what did you think of the athlete poet’s poem to the spirits? I cannot do it in a single second like your spell, but it should explode in...let’s say thirty seconds. So...”

The sounds of bows being tightly drawn grew louder around Naruze. The bowstrings started to sound metallic.

And Dudley’s trembling voice could be heard over the straining of the bows.

“S-surrender, students of Musashi. Wh-wh-wh-what is it? I thought the students of Musashi Ariadust made an enemy of the Testament Union to protect a single princess. ...Your primary defender is now our hostage. So what kind of performance is this?”

Dudley held up her gauntlet and raised her eyebrows slightly.

“W-will the leaders of this academy abandon one of their own?”

However, Naruze heard an immediate response.

“C’mom, c’mom. Don’t look down on us like that, ladies. We haven’t abandoned her.”

This voice came from a new sign frame.

“M-M-Musashi’s chancellor and president, Aoi Toori!” cried Dudley with a frown. “Wh-why are you naked!?”

Dudley saw the naked boy displayed in the pagan sign frame.

He looked at her with his arms folded, but Musashi’s vice president and vice chancellor could be seen behind him retying a rope around his neck. The naked boy looked back at the two girls.

“Eh? Hey! What are you two doing this time!? I’m not gonna run away!”

“Shut up. We don’t want you wandering around and being a bother while we’re busy rescuing people. And we can’t have you doing anything to Horizon while she’s unconscious. At any rate, hurry up and say what you have to say.”

“Chehh,” muttered the naked boy below his breath. He then frowned toward Dudley. “Well? Um... What is it you want? Hurry up and tell me.”

“Y-you contacted me!!” shouted Dudley as she felt somewhat dizzy.

...Ah, my chronic high blood pressure.

Her excessively low weight gave her somewhat high blood pressure, so she tried to avoid getting too angry. She could handle slow-going types like Cecil, but not everyone was like that in reality.

Lucky for them, I am a very helpful woman, she thought.

“I-I was asking if you are willing to abandon your friend.”

“Eh? Oh, don’t worry about that. Listen up, okay?”

Just as he struck a pose, the vice president tied the rope to the deck railing behind him and tugged twice to make sure it would not come loose.

“The way I see it...kh!? The way...keh!? Are you not going to let me speak!?”

“Eh? Oh, sorry, sorry. I’m done. You can talk now.”

“O-okay! In that case, listen up!”

“Oh, it has come loose over there, Masazumi,” cut in the vice chancellor.

“As I was saying, I...gh! I...kh! ...Keh!? Did you have to pull it a third time!?”

The Weiss Hexen fallen angel visible beyond the sign frame nodded twice. She turned toward Dudley with the ends of her eyebrows lowered in a look of pity.

“Don’t talk to him too much or you’ll catch his stupidity.”

“Don’t lie, Naruze! You can’t catch that just from talking to me! Touching me is a different story, though!” The naked boy took a Y-shaped pose of protest, but soon got back on topic. “Listen. I’ll never abandon anyone! You can count on that!”

“What? Really, Aoi? Even if it was Tenzou?”

“Eh...?”

“Wh-what kind of question is that, Masazumi-dono!? Your personality really has taken a turn for the worse lately!”

“Calm down, calm down.”

The boy in the Y-shaped pose and Musashi’s vice president restrained the ninja with their hands.

“Whatever’s going on in Musashi, the Far East, or the world, I will never abandon anyone,” said the naked boy as he folded his arms. “And listen. Naruze there has more willpower than you think she does. At the very least, she isn’t the type to just let someone take her hostage.”

As those words left the sign frame, something happened.

The fallen angel in front of Dudley swung up her right hand.

...What is she trying to do!?

What did she hope to do against the arrows and the time bomb?

Dudley did not know what the fallen angel was doing, but there was nothing she could actually do. Dudley gave a command using Brachium Justitia – Vetus on her left hand. She instructed the arrows to shoot the girl.

She had already warned the girl, so it was the girl's own fault for moving despite the warning.

And so Dudley let out a cry. She had already sent the command mentally, but vocalizing it seemed to drive the meaning home.

“Sh-sh-sh-shoot her!”

As soon as Dudley gave the command, she saw a bitter smile appear on the fallen angel's lips.

“Too bad. I suppose I will be leaving now that I have exposed the abilities of three of you.”

The fallen angel spoke those words at almost the exact same moment as the arrows were fired behind her back.

Several dozen arrows flew to pierce that fallen angel's body in an instant.

But something else arrived before those arrows. A line of light flew from the center of Musashi to their right. That white trailing ether light was...

...A stake!?

No, it was a thick cylindrical arrow with the tip crushed down.

Wondering what it was, Dudley followed the line back to where the thick arrow had been fired. Her gaze moved faster than her body and she saw a female student standing atop the towing belt travelling between the front center ship and the second starboard ship.

She held a giant white bow that had just been fired.

“Th-th-th-the rumored sniper shrine maiden!”

“Who are you calling a sniper!?”

While taking her follow-through breath, Asama waited for the feedback of a hit.

She had accurately read location, distance, and the wind. The divine purification protection had successfully taken the arrow through the area ruled by Cecil’s gravitational burden and Dudley’s strange Testamenta Arma. She had gone to all this trouble for one reason.

...Blow Naruze away!

It had started with the divine transmission earlier. Naruze’s response had told Asama what she should do. The meaning had been hidden in Naruze’s speech.

...If you join, you can start with things that are more elementary. And as a club, you can make the excuse that it’s part of school. We’ll make sure to give you a grand entrance. You can learn a lot and it will make a nice break from the shrine and all its ceremony.

Without being told, Asama had known to take the last word of each sentence.

“The elementary school entrance ceremony!”

And Naruze had followed it up with the title “What I Want to Do”.

In that case, thought Asama.

There had been a few different people she had failed to shoot that day approximately twelve years ago. Naruze was one of them. If that was what Naruze wanted, this was a good chance to somewhat make up for her failure twelve years ago. And so Asama had prepared a non-penetrating anti-shock arrow.

“Hit!” she cried as white light exploded above Shinagawa.

Her arrow had crashed into Naruze.

The girl with six black wings was blasted to the starboard side.

The arrow burst the instant it struck and its light expanded with a pressure that pushed the girl out of the way. Due to Cecil’s weight, she did not float well, but she was still knocked a few dozen meters away.

“...!”

She had wrapped her wings around herself in advance, but she still rolled quite a bit.

An instant later, the arrows flew into the spot she had just been in, but now their trajectory took them toward Dudley.

“...!”

Just as Dudley’s cheeks bent in a frown, the steam bomb exploded in front of her.

The white steam hid the arrows and Dudley could not see for a moment.

However, the countless arrows instantly stabbed through the steam. They crossed paths at the spot Naruze had been in, but they continued on to Dudley.

Dudley therefore swung the Testamenta Arma on her left arm.

“Drop!”

The command just barely arrived in time. Only a dozen or so centimeters in front of her, the arrows stabbed into the ground like a thicket with sharp leaves and branches.

However, it did not end there. Instead of breaking through the steam in front of Dudley, something with giant wings blew the steam away altogether.

“A half-dragon!?”

“2nd Special Duty Kiyonari Urquiaga is here!”

A giant body covered in a blue and white exoskeleton charged toward Dudley.

Despite Cecil’s weight, the half-dragon charged forward while partly running and partly flying.

“I will give you a warm welcome, heretic!”

He held no weapon, so he faced Dudley simply by charging forward.

He filled the distance in no time at all, so Dudley did not have time to swing her right hand.

However, someone managed to move in that time.

“Mate, I hope this is not enough to give you trouble.”

Those words were accompanied by the movement of legs covered in white tights and thick shoes. Behind Dudley, Jonson instantly accelerated from a crouching start.

On his third step, Jonson swung his right leg up and struck the half-dragon’s right shoulder with the sole of the shoe.

“Express yourselves, oh words!”

The printing incantation devices on the bottoms of his feet wrote printed words in the air using light.

“As she stands still, oh wind, pass by her in human form!”

An attack that was not a restraint or a kick struck the half-dragon and knocked him to the left.

As a sound of impact rang out, Jonson landed and clenched his right fist.

“Good!”

Just as he spoke, a figure suddenly appeared before him. It was a boy who had jumped down from the half-dragon’s back.

With a calm look in his eyes, he carried a piece of squared lumber that could be used as a support.

“You are Noriki who defeated Professor Galileo, are you not!?”

“If you know who I am, why bother mentioning it?”

“I see,” said Jonson as he looked to the left.

There, he saw a certain sight. The half-dragon had used the momentum of being knocked away in order to pick up the black-winged girl who had rolled away earlier.

“I see. That charge was a decoy allowing you to rescue the Technohexen and transport a warrior.”

“I’m no warrior,” said the boy with a calm look in his eyes. “I’m a laborer.”

Naruze’s body was unsteady due to the impact and the tumble, so she could only watch the battlefield.

More in front of her than to the side was Urquiaga who stood between her and the British force. The 2nd special duty officer obstructed her view quite badly, but he made excellent cover. Naruze managed to stand up behind him.

“Well done getting here,” she commented.

“We could not have done it without you exposing their abilities.”

“Any more praise and I’m going to feel humiliated, so could you leave it at that?”

“I see Technohexen these days are terribly conceited.”

Urquiaga then moved forward. Naruze tried to follow, but...

...*Kh*.

Her wings felt heavy. She could feel heat in the flight muscles exclusive to winged races which were located on her shoulder blades and the lower portion of her trapezius, and she could not gather strength in them. She felt the same heat above her right knee and in the front lower portion of her shoulders.

Those muscles had been tense under the heavy burden of Cecil’s weight and the previous impact and tumble had caused that tension to collapse.

To make matters worse, that weight was still affecting her because she had not escaped its effective range. Each time she moved her body, that heat seemed to produce more weight, so she felt as if her body was hanging down from her bones.

Like this, I’m only in the way, she muttered in her heart.

Urquiaga seemed to understand how she felt because he moved forward without speaking a word.

The half-dragon loosely moved both shoulders around in a circle and took a large step toward the British force.

As Naruze watched, she took half a step back.

...*Damn.*

She felt a thick weight over her entire body below her inner suit, so she took another step back.

A few black feathers scattered as she moved away from the battlefield.

Even as she left the noises, movements, and wind of the battle, Naruze kept her back to the rear of the ship and made sure Naito could not see her.

“Dammit...”

She wiped the corner of her eye with the back of her right hand.

She could hear the sounds of the battle beginning once more.

The battle took the form of martial arts underneath extra weight.

Cecil floated and added that extra weight while Shakespeare was immersed in a book. Ahead of those two, Jonson and Dudley fought Noriki.

England’s goal was to stop Musashi and leave it unable to fight. Musashi’s goal was to stop England from doing so.

However, the situation would come to an end once Musashi entered its course around England.

“Just two more minutes! Please hold them off that long!” Masazumi’s voice filled Musashi via Mitotsudaira’s sign frame. “Once we begin circling England, Musashi can reach them! That will mean Trumps failed to keep England untouched. Even if they stop Musashi then, it won’t be a complete victory. Any further fighting will become a matter of pride rather than actual use!”

“You are giving meaning to this battlefield, aren’t you? Your words give different meaning to the situation and point the spotlight away from who wins and who loses,” said Jonson as he took a step away from Noriki, leaped lightly

into the air, and wrote words as he spun around. “A very poetic method. There is more to a situation than what meets the eye. You retain the dignity for the ones who created this battlefield by betting on our win or loss, but rather than let those creators speak for themselves, you express that result with different words.”

He took a breath as he landed.

“Fly into the sky.”

The instant Jonson both finished typing his spell and landed, the large wooden container under his feet flew up.

Despite the extra weight being placed on the battlefield, the twenty meter tall container rose with ease.

Dudley then struck it with her open palm. With a sound of impact, the box spun around and flew through the air.

“How very light.”

The container fell to the deck and was smashed to pieces along with the furniture loaded inside.

Sounds of cracking and snapping wood rang out as the fragments flew into the air and disappeared. However, no one looked in that direction. All focus was on Dudley.

“C-c-c-can you see this?”

She held one of the arrows that had been fired and stabbed into the deck earlier. She held the arrow vertically over a cargo opening.

“Cecil. F-f-f-focus your ‘handing out’ on this.”

In the next moment, two things happened.

First, the weight bearing down on Shinagawa vanished for only an instant.

Second, the arrow in Dudley's hand disappeared.

“...!!”

An intense vibration came from the bottom of the opening at her feet.

The ship shook as if jumping up and “Shinagawa” gave a ship-wide announcement.

“!? An unknown object of extreme weight has penetrated the fourth underground level!! The suspension frame and wide block #9 of levels 1, 2, and 3 have been damaged! Beginning native control to prevent secondary damages during cargo transport!” She took a breath. “I have determined this attack is very dangerous! Over!”

Everyone heard “Shinagawa's” words that could be taken as surprise or a scream.

And in response, two members of the Musashi side stepped forward.

Noriki stepped forward to confront Jonson.

“Noriki, you handle that poet. I will take care of that floating gravity source,” said a voice to starboard.

A single giant form walked toward the battlefield. It was...

“The half-dragon from before?”

“Indeed. I am Kiyonari Urquiaga the Inquisitor.” He calmly walked through the weight bearing down on him. “I have two things to tell you. First, my ancestors were the race that explored high gravity areas. We have become a bit rare as a race, but we have not lost that ability. This much weight will have no effect on me. And second...”

Without nodding, Urquiaga pointed at Jonson.

“Men should not read poetry.”

The silence and motionless brought on by Urquiaga’s words was eventually broken by someone.

It was Dudley. She glanced over at Jonson and slowly nodded twice.

“S-s-s-sometimes his light, conceited style gets on my nerves. I’m left wondering what he is talking about.”

“Mate, wh-whose side are you on!?”

“I’m light, too,” added Cecil.

The weight suddenly increased and the deck lowered a bit. The wooden containers making up the deck were beginning to warp.

That weight was passed on to the ship’s frame, so Shinagawa creaked as the sides were pushed out from the center. The weight of course affected those on the deck as well.

“...Nh.”

Noriki fell to his knees, but held onto his piece of lumber to stay upright. However, Jonson was not affected by the weight, so he sighed and stared at Noriki.

“You are done for either way. We only have a little more than a minute left and that half-dragon’s endurance is a threat, but Cecil can provide more weight and Dudley can throw more arrows. So...”

So...

“You – and I mean that as the plural ‘you’ – are done for.”

“I hope everyone is okay,” said Asama as Kimi walked up next to her on the thick rope passageway connecting the rear of Shinagawa to Musashino.

Kimi observed the warping of Shinagawa that was visible from outside and listened to the ship-wide announcement.

“During the age of the gods, half-dragons were modified as a race to survive in high gravity areas and on high gravity planets, right? They may be a rare race now, but they make an excellent trump card for moments like this.”

Kimi then tapped on Asama’s shoulder and wrapped her left arm under her own chest.

“More importantly, you have nothing to do here, so why don’t you go elsewhere?”

“But...”

“Heh heh heh. As a sniper woman known on an international level, I know you want to shoot people left and right and make some victims bleed, but this is no longer a situation in which shooting will do any good. You need to leave.”

Asama initially wanted to deny most of that yet agree to the ultimate conclusion, but...

“You aren’t going to do anything, Kimi?” she asked instead.

She was essentially asking if Kimi did not want to help given the situation. However...

“No. I am a normal student, remember?” said Kimi casually as she looked toward Shinagawa. “Then again, so is Noriki. But I have no actual combat abilities. And...”

Kimi raised her right hand and placed the index finger on Asama’s forehead. Asama looked up slightly from beyond that finger.

“You are a shrine maiden, so you are not supposed to participate in combat either.”

And yet...

“If you feel the need to do something and force yourself to take part, you will only make things more painful later. In your current state, my foolish brother and the others are hesitant to include you in combat. A proper woman should not force herself into the middle of it all where she will accomplish nothing. Try inviting them over to you without trying to win their favor.”

“I-I’m not forcing myself into-...”

“Don’t bother lying.”

Kimi forcibly cut her off. Asama tried to resist, but she realized growing stubborn would not help.

“You miss out on a lot being a shrine maiden,” lamented Asama.

“Yes. You aren’t allowed to shoot people.”

“I-I think your view of me is a bit off, Kimi!”

“Heh heh heh. The fact that I was only ‘a bit’ off is making me shudder.”

“Huh!? Wh-why is everyone being so harsh with me today!?”

Asama hung her head down upon realizing how useless she was, but Kimi opened her mouth to speak once more.

“Aren’t there others things you can do? All the blood will make you want to shoot something, but you can go heal Naomasa and listen to her complaints. And. Another. Thing,” she said with clear distinction between each word. “You need to trust the others more. They are more than just idiots. After all, they are all people my foolish brother fully trusts. And you fall under that category as well.”

Kimi lowered her finger and lightly pressed in below the edge of Asama's uniform's chest band. Immediately afterwards...

“Eh?”

Just like a grape skin being peeled off, the black chest band slipped around below her breasts due to the weight from above. With the band slipped down, her breasts pressed down on the center fastener.

“...!?”

This weight split open the fastener, opening the suit wide from within.

With her body and skin fully exposed from the neck down to below her breasts, Asama frantically wrapped her arms around them to hold them in place.

“Eh!? Ah...kyaaaah!!”

“That's quite the energetic scream for someone hanging their head like that. Did you not notice I was supporting mine from below?”

“O-of course I didn't!!” shouted Asama.

She saw injured and non-injured boys gathered on the edge of Musashino and Shinagawa, all with giant grins and pointing their right thumbs upwards, so she fired arrows in both directions.

The screams and other sounds produced by her arrows were accompanied by a metallic groaning.

Shinagawa was creaking under the weight being placed on it.

Everyone frowned and turned cautiously toward Shinagawa.

“Huh?”

But they quickly let out confused voices.

“Is that...?”

The mist above Shinagawa had been sinking down under the weight, but it was now gently floating up and beginning to produce convection.

“Is the weight lessening!?”

As Jonson fought with Noriki over his location, he saw something.

The half-dragon was advancing.

Step by step, that giant form with solid wings approached Cecil despite the weight bearing down on him.

The weight was definitely there. The half-dragon’s feet were breaking out of his shoes and he was leaving definite footprints on the wooden deck.

However, those footprints also meant that he had not stopped walking.

“You really are a half-dragon!”

As far as Jonson could tell, the half-dragon could not freely fly while under Cecil’s weight and he could just barely walk.

“Concentrated attack,” said Cecil lightly.

That meant she was placing the weight such that the half-dragon was in the center.

Cecil’s eyebrows rose, her altitude rose, and the half-dragon’s exoskeleton began to creak. However...

“Not nearly enough!” roared the half-dragon as he took another step forward.

“...!”

Cecil arrogantly poured the weight on, but it took time to raise the weight over the entire area. Instead, she diverted the overall weight toward the half-dragon. And so...

“Are you going to ignore me?”

The boy named Noriki began to move more lightly.

Jonson had a single thought concerning this laborer warrior who opposed him.

...This boy is dangerous, too!

Jonson faced the opponent who he alternatively attacked and defended against.

Due to the weight, Noriki had sweat on his brow and was relying on pure strength in his movements. Jonson, on the other hand, raised his attack speed with a spell. Noriki chose a certain strategy when faced with that situation where his opponent had an overwhelming advantage.

“You’re focusing solely on defense!?”

“It’s kind of pathetic, so don’t say it out loud.”

The lumber he had used as a support now functioned as a shield as he focused on defense. His arms, legs, and movements stopped, deflected, or evaded attacks. He seemed to take some attacks as feints, but...

...Even those are throw-away delaying actions used as defense!

Those feints had meaning. They sealed Jonson’s actions as he stood between Cecil and Dudley.

Noriki did not have to win. He only had to keep Jonson from helping the others.

...This boy is good for someone who is not an officer or student council member!

Jonson observed his opponent as he started mentally writing poetic praise.

“...!”

He saw Noriki with his hands full simply defending and moving his wooden support in and out of place. He was covered in sweat and baring his teeth, so it was difficult to think of any word despite “desperate”.

He made up for his lack of skills by going all out. He had stamina and speed, but his arm strength was average for his age. That was his weakness.

One could call him unbalanced and awkward.

It was poetic.

...But...

“To choose a defensive focus in this sort of short-term battle, you must be on the level of the chancellor’s officers or the student council!”

Jonson received no response. He raised his speed, so Noriki wordlessly worked at his own speed. The boy truly had his hands full now, but he still managed to force his defense through.

He was dangerous.

And so Jonson turned toward Dudley.

“You! Can you fire another arrow!?”

“I-I-I can! More importantly, C-C-Cecil!?”

Cecil was attempting to hold back the gradually approaching half-dragon. She had both palms stretched out toward him and her face was red, but she managed to speak.

“Testament. I can do it.”

“Testament! W-w-w-wonderful, Cecil!”

The fletching of Dudley’s arrow vibrated as if shuddering. This showed that Cecil had reset the distribution of weight.

Dudley released the arrow as if placing it in midair.

“Arrow #2! G-g-go all the way to the primary frame!”

To make doubly sure, Dudley struck the arrow down with her right hand.

The arrow immediately vanished, the weight instantly vanished, and everyone braced themselves for the coming vibration.

“ ... ”

After a moment of silence, a loud noise reverberated from the hole the arrow had vanished into. However, it was not the creaking of metal or the roar of destruction. It was a human voice.

“Owww!!!”

Dudley looked down toward the source of that scream which had been accompanied by a loud impact.

“Wh-wh-what is that round thing!?”

She could tell it was a vassal’s mobile shell, but why was it being held by a half-naked macho man wearing a bucket helmet and why was it staggering unsteadily.

“A-ah. W-wait! Um... Wh-what was that thing that just fell on me!?”

Dudley dropped the next one, but the macho man swiftly placed the mobile shell in the spot the arrow dropped toward.

“Eh? I just have to stand here? Okay, but... Oww!?”

With the sound of a direct hit, the mobile shell floated up lightly from the rebound. However, the arrow did not pierce through.

...That mobile shell's anti-impact structure and broad feet are dispersing the impact!?

The ship still creaked, but it only shook lightly.

"I can't believe it," muttered Dudley while beginning to sweat.

She recalled seeing that vassal acting as a shield during the Battle of Mikawa. It had not been noticeable then because the mobile shell had only been fired on horizontally, but the anti-impact structures of each part were made to almost perfectly stop even impacts from above. The way the mobile shell bounced up in the rebound was proof of that. Its defenses were set quite high.

The one wearing the shell would have a hard time moving, but their safety was ensured by the perfect defense.

And so Dudley leaped to the port side to her right.

"Kh!"

And she fired another arrow.

However, she saw immediate movement below. Down in the cargo opening, a nude and muscular incubus gave a refreshing smile from the port side wall.

"Ha ha ha! Over here, Persona-kun! Come on over!!"

The macho man named Persona-kun picked up the mobile shell and moved to the port side.

"Eh? Ah? Owwww!?"

"Kh," groaned Dudley.

This time, she leaped to the starboard side and fired an arrow, but a slime was attached to the starboard side wall.

“Yes, now you must come toward me!”

“Ah, wait... Eh? Owwww!”

A great vibration and noise exploded out and wind blasted up through the hole, but the arrow did not penetrate any lower and the mobile shell only staggered a bit.

“S-s-s-stop pissing me off!” shouted Dudley with veins bulging on her forehead and an arrow between each of her spread fingers. “It’s time for rapid fire!!”

The noise and impacts of the mobile shell stopping the arrows were transmitted by the recording devices in the cargo area.

The students on the transport ship used a sign frame to watch Persona-kun move left and right while Dudley dropped arrows from above while also moving left and right.

“Tenzou, doesn’t seeing this scene on a sign frame make you want buttons for moving them left and right?”

“Judge. I used to have a black and white handheld charm game like this. It was made by a Kyou corporation and I had the Giant Octopus and Fire games.”

“This is more like the Insane Monkey Man game that had two screens. You move Persona-kun back and forth on the bottom screen while Noriki moves up and down on the top screen to hold the poet back.”

“Oh, I can hear you!” said Adele from within the mobile shell. “That kind of video game is...owww! W-wait! You’re rattling my brain! My brain! My brain!!”

“What do you do when the damage builds up, Tenzou?”

“Judge. You recover by tapping the right button as fast as you can to drink the goop Nenji-dono hands you.”

“You two need to take this more seriously,” said Futayo with a sigh.

“That’s right,” agreed Masazumi.

“Listen,” began Futayo as she pointed at the sign frame and raised her eyebrows.

“The two of you need to worry about what comes later. After all, the true challenge begins when you reach 100 points and enter high speed mode.”

“You need to take this more seriously, too!” shouted everyone.

“I-if I get hit by 100 of these, I’m staying home from the academy tomorrow!” said Adele through the sign frame.

“A day off would be enough?” someone muttered, but the impacts and screams continued.

Toori would occasionally give comments like “Pe-yan, not there!” as time passed.

Whenever the arrows were fired, the weight holding Urquiaga down would lessen and he would walk forward. Eventually, he made it within ten steps of Cecil.

Someone shouted out in response to that situation.

“Shakespeare! Help Dudley with the arrows!”

But Shakespeare did not respond to Jonson’s voice. The sign frame footage showed her with her face buried in a book.

“Heh heh. ‘Whose tentacle is this!?’ So they’re bringing back the tenta-collector joke here.”

“Listen to me, you!”

That shout finally caused Shakespeare to raise her head, but she did not close her paperback book.

“Shut up,” was all she said.

She turned back toward the book and closed her covered long ears to shut out the surrounding noise. However, she gave one offhand comment as she immediately losing herself in the book again.

“That’s a pain, so I’ll just write it. That’s fine, isn’t it?”

“W-w-w-wait!”

Dudley’s voice caused the sign frame’s voice device to tremble. She stopped firing arrows and turned toward Shakespeare with her eyebrows raised.

“Th-th-this is an order as vice chancellor! Do not use that power without restriction outside of the mainland! We only brought you with us because you agreed to that, so...”

“I only wanted to go to Musashi’s bookstores after we took control. ...Including the used bookstores. Seeing my books with ten yen stickers is quite thrilling. More importantly, Dudley, do your job. Do it for the queen.”

That last sentence seemed to affect Dudley more than the rest.

She gave a snort and a final parting glance toward Shakespeare.

“Y-y-you are an impertinent child, but I will forgive you as you have not forgotten about Her Majesty the Queen. E-e-even if it was a blatant attempt to manipulate me. And in that case...”

Dudley swept her hand across several arrows to fire them.

“Th-th-th-three at once!”

Three arrows. They could not defend against that with Adele as their only shield.

Everyone knew the triple attack would reach the bottom of the ship.

But in the next instant, everyone saw a certain sight.

<The arrows were swept up in the wind and fell to the ground.>

As if swayed by the words which reverberated through the air, the three arrows moving at high speed suddenly lost their speed. It looked like they were swaying in the wind.

No one there had the ability to do that.

If someone had done it, it was a newcomer to the battlefield.

The first to notice the newcomer was Shakespeare as she looked up from her book. She quietly looked beyond the lines of large wooden containers and spoke.

“There he is.”

The person to whom Shakespeare referred arrived on the battlefield.

“Sorry I’m late.”

He released a few divine texts into the air, lightly raised his right hand, and gave his name.

“I am Musashi Ariadust Academy’s secretary, Toussaint Neshinbara.”

As Jonson fought Noriki, he handled his enemy’s attacks with his feet and turned toward the newcomer.

Musashi’s secretary, Neshinbara, ran over from the opposite side of the cargo opening.

A civil official Mouse stood on his shoulder and his hands typed on a sign frame keyboard.

As a literature type, Neshinbara was out of breath. However...

<His breathing slowed and his running legs reliably brought him toward his enemies.>

Jonson saw the bluish-white light of ether scattering above Neshinbara's head and around his shoulders. As the ether scattered like snowflakes, Jonson realized what it was.

...Cecil's weight spell is breaking apart.

Cecil's spell was not affecting Neshinbara. This was because...

<With less than thirty seconds remaining, he finally arrived at his enemies. And he spoke.>

"Sorry I'm late. I'm just a slow runner is all."

While dealing with Noriki, Jonson realized something from what Neshinbara said and the feeling it gave him.

"Shakespeare! He is-..."

Jonson trailed off before he could say "an author".

Shakespeare had stood up with her book in hand.

...That capricious girl stood up!?

But Neshinbara took action before anything more could happen.

"Sorry."

<As the enemy stood up, she was suddenly slammed to the deck.>

Neshinbara typed those words into his sign frame keyboard.

<He had broken up and stored the weight bearing down on him, so he was able to strike her with it.>

The text became reality.

“It’s a type of prayer. In Shinto, it can be used as a spell. You just need a god that can pull it off, but with intermediaries, most anything is possible. In my case, it’s Sugawara-style Itsuru, the god of writing.”

<He said.>

“My spell is named Mountains of Words. I pray that the writings I have dedicated will be reproduced in reality.”

<With a great roar and a creaking of the deck, the enemy crumbled to the deck. The falling weight became an impact that struck the enemy and the space around her and produced a powerful explosion of wind.>

An explosion blossomed in front of Neshinbara and a great noise burst out.

<And that left one less enemy.>

Neshinbara took a breath.

...I’m glad I could finish that quickly by taking the first move.

Once the strategist defeated one of the enemies, the people’s image of the battle would change greatly. That fact would demonstrate that the strategist had put himself in danger on the front lines and that he had the power to handle that danger. And by proving the strategist was useful, opinion of him would be more positive. So...

...Well, that should be good enough.

The battle was not over, but he needed to focus on covering for the others because Mountains of Words was a slow spell to activate.

The god of writing enjoyed being entertained, so he loved reading the novels and other writings of his followers. Anything entertaining one wrote could be dedicated, but it was not an immediate judgment like money was for the god of commerce. A high quality text was needed to entertain the god of writing. And to use the powers of other gods using the god of writing as an intermediary, the conditions necessary for that god's power had to be written in novel form. All in all, it took time.

Neshinbara had undergone a semi-high level contract, so he could use his past writings as dedication copy-paste material. That allowed him to abbreviate a lot, but reusing the same text like that caused the dedication efficiency to drop. That was why Neshinbara had his Mouse, Michizane, automatically create copy-paste material from the doujinshi he had written. This gave him a stock of unused dedication copy-paste material.

He had just used dedication copy-paste material from the manuscript he had prepared for a spring event. He had not used his entire stock during the Battle of Mikawa, so he had several doujinshi's worth to spare.

“Well, that should do it...”

Neshinbara began to turn to the starboard side. He began to turn to look at Dudley, Jonson, Noriki, Cecil, and Urquiaga.

“...Eh?”

But before he could, he saw someone standing in front of him.

It was a skinny long-eared girl wearing a white coat. It was Shakespeare.

She stood within the wind as if nothing had happened. It was as if she had ignored his attack.

And she opened her mouth to speak.

“Quite an interesting spell,” she said as she slowly nodded and stared at him through her glasses. “You could say this is author vs. author. Surely you didn’t think you could burn down a fellow author with expressions at that level.”

Chapter 08: Herald on the Stage

CHAPTER 8

"Herald on the Stage"



People face each other
But what does one show another?
Point Allocation (Cheering)

People face each other

But what does one show another?

Point Allocation (Cheering)

...My text realization spell using prayers was negated!?

Shakespeare responded to Neshinbara's doubts by pushing her thick glasses up her nose. With her mouth lying flat, she began to speak.

"You should write more. For example," she began. But she quickly said the opposite. "No, I shouldn't bring hypotheticals into such an important discussion. Doing so is based on the careless assumption that the other person thinks the same way you do. It will not help them understand your point of view. So..."

With that last word, light appeared. It was a small light and it appeared within her hair, but it quickly appeared as a long string.

It was a string of small glowing letters. Letters of the alphabet measuring only a few millimeters grew from her hair in the form of words and sentences. Their numbers grew and grew.

"..."

Shakespeare trembled as if the sentences leaking from her hair were tickling her. It started with about a dozen letters, but it quickly grew to dozens, hundreds, and beyond.

<However, the enemy was immediately struck by a second attack. A clear sound rang out and the strings of letters scattered.>

<<But it all returned to normal.>>

"...!?"

Wind really did whip up around her and a vibration really could be felt through the floor. Nevertheless...

<<She stood there as if nothing had happened.>>

“Don’t be so surprised. Just think of it as similar to the divine music spell you use,” explained Shakespeare. Her string of letters had already exceeded the thousands and continued to grow. “Do you know the difference between novel text and a mere sentence?”

“Novel text is meant to combine with other texts to express a story while a mere sentence is a standalone statement?”

“Testament. That is why novel text can optimize the description of what it is meant to express. Another difference is whether you want ugly text that perfectly optimizes the target of expression or if you want nice flowing text that does not fully optimize it. Words are abstract concepts that cannot perfectly express one’s thoughts, so there are many different ways of representing things.”

As she spoke, Shakespeare raised her lowered head.

At the same time, Neshinbara saw the string of text coming from her hair form a gentle curve. It seemed to circle around into a curve that supported her back and butt.

“This is a composite method of using Anglican Church Testament Signs. It is known as Lord Chamberlain’s Men. I spent the seven years until I moved from Stratford to London constructing this theatre spell.”

She went on to describe the principle behind it and its effects.

“Many different Testament Signs are broken down into strings of text and reconstructed based on the text I use to express the target. It is quite similar to your spell which brings about its effects by combining dedication copy-paste material. The primary difference is that you dedicate your text while mine is based in the Modern Signs of the Anglican Church. That means I must prepare spell charms.”

Shakespeare pulled a thick book from the paper bag sitting next to her.

...Is that...?

A few dozen pages had already turned to light and scattered.

“This is the theatre script I prepared for today. I somehow managed to construct this theatre because Jonson and the queen wished for me to design this, but the queen is quite cruel. She told me I had to prepare the Blessings needed to activate the spell.”

“Wouldn’t that require a huge amount? Tsirhc doesn’t allow the use of Inner Blessings, right? Did you violate that ban and create an external pool somewhere? Or were you allotted some from England’s ether fuel tank?”

Shakespeare did not answer his question. She only stared at him.

“The curtain opens.”

As pages of the script turned to light and scattered, she held it to her chest.

“Macbeth.”

Immediately afterwards, Neshinbara saw an attack stab through the wind directly in front of him.

The strike knocked him to the ground, but the striker had already circled around behind him.

“!?”

“Oh,” he heard Shakespeare say. She spoke aloud her own script which she was revising.

<<Oh, that is Macbeth. The man who wishes to be king and whose ambitions are as high as a mountain peak, whose heart is as cold as the icy sky, and whose body is as solid as the noble crags of a cliff.>>

The string of letters formed a medieval knight. But this was not a magnificent armored knight on horseback who travelled across the plains. This was a knight of the highlands who wore light armor and leather clothes to keep out the cold. He was armed with a long and short sword.

<<Macbeth, go meet with the three Technohexen in the land of great wind. Oppose the Vikings as they attempt to land and meet the three Technohexen who gather souls on the battlefield.>>

There were three women on the battlefield: Cecil, Dudley, and...

...Shakespeare may be the author, but...

“You double as an actress!”

“Testament.”

Neshinbara could see Shakespeare’s mouth moving out of the corner of his eye. The string of text coming from her hair continued to grow as the third Technohexen spoke. She looked past Neshinbara and toward Macbeth.

<<Rejoice, for you shall become king,>> foretold the Technohexen. <<Ah, but Macbeth...>>

She then turned to Neshinbara. He clearly saw her eyes staring at him from behind her thick glasses.

<<You are a usurper who shall kill the king. And you shall kill your friend for peace of mind.>>

“!?”

The words and gaze turned toward Neshinbara brought doubt to his mind. After all, Macbeth had been made real with Shakespeare’s spell. However...

...Why is she speaking Macbeth's prophecy to me!?

The answer came to him in the form of a motion. The string of text forming Macbeth came apart and bent toward him like countless paper strings. They leaped toward him with wavelike motion.

“...!”

Neshinbara realized it was a curse from the play.

Shakespeare's spell alone could construct the play, but it seemed she could also assign roles to people just as she had given herself a Technohexen role.

...Her words can give people the same fate as the role in the play!

It was a word-based curse that was similar to binding someone or forcing them to do something. Most likely, the spell influenced one's words, actions, and reactions in accordance with the contents of the play. Just like one felt like moving after reading or watching a book or play with lots of action, this indirectly led one to a similar destiny.

...What happens in Macbeth again?

Before he gave that any thought, Neshinbara began to write.

<The strings of letters were destroyed by an impact. This impact was a reconstruction of the spell and was made with ether, so the strings of text made from ether were crushed.>

The knight made of letters was defeated, but the Technohexen spoke another prophecy.

<<Macbeth, you shall not die.>>

<<Macbeth, you shall become king.>>

However...

<<However, be careful, ambitious king. You are lord of the freezing sky. The darkness of further winter falls even upon the isolated land of constant winter. Even you who seek to usurp the throne will eventually confront darkness omens. So I say this to you as a spectator.>>

Before she could finish speaking, the knight began to reconstruct.

<<You cannot be defeated by anyone born of a woman.>>

Its body came apart once more.

<But another strike hits it.>

And it was destroyed. The meaning of this was obvious. Macbeth was one of the four great tragedies Shakespeare had created in accordance with the Testament descriptions. In the play, the Technohexen's prophecies about the ambitious Macbeth ultimately came true.

...He assassinated the king, killed his friend who knew, and...

He was killed by his friend's child as revenge because this friend's child had been born by Caesarean section. And there had been one other prophecy.

<<Until Birnam forest moves, you will have peace.>>

When his friend's child's army arrived while camouflaged as the trees of the forest, Macbeth made up his mind and a new king was born after his defeat.

What if that story was applied to Neshinbara as a member of the student council?

...I am destined to destroy the king!

He did not know how much of an effect it would have, but a curse caused by a spell would have a real effect. This was no superstition. Now that the curse had been applied to him, some power would surely cause him to harm his king.

He was a member of the student council and a strategist. If he was being manipulated by a destroying curse without realizing it, he could invite in enemies or set up traps.

In that case, he had no choice but to win here. He had to eliminate the curse.

<No matter how many times the enemy tries to stand back up, he has decided to crush that enemy.>

However, the smashed strings of text immediately stood back up.

<<Macbeth, you shall not die.>>

“There’s no end to this!”

Meanwhile, Dudley suddenly raised her hand mirror while standing next to the hole in the floor.

“C-C-C-Cecil! Can you see this?”

The mirror reflected something in the hole that she wanted Cecil to see.

“C-c-c-c-can you directly ‘hand out’ the weight to that vassal’s mobile shell?”

“Eh? Ehhhh!? A direct hit without using the arrows!?” cried Adele.

A moment later, the weight let up for an instant.

“...!?”

And Shinagawa violently shook up and down.

The shaking of the ship was accompanied by sounds of wooden containers being destroyed at the bottom of the cargo opening.

The ship trembled and a moment later alarms began ringing.

“Adele-sama has broken her way down to the third basement! Over!”

Things would not be too bad if she had merely fallen that far down. However...

“I! Can’t! Move! I-I’m stuck in the cargo frame!”

Neshinbara clenched his back teeth as he heard Adele’s voice from below.

...This weight spell...

The spell normally added weight evenly to everything from above and the weight could be separated between people and their possessions. Now that Adele had fallen down but could not move, the impact would pass through her and directly into the ship’s frame.

Fortunately, Urquiaga continued to advance, so Cecil could only release the weight and slam it into Adele once more.

That meant Dudley was the key to the situation. The moment Dudley captured Adele’s location with her mirror, the battle was over. That meant Noriki or Neshinbara had to go.

“The play is not over yet.”

Macbeth stood up and Dudley spoke.

“Cecil! Fly up even further. Fly high enough to sink the ship if you so much as scratch her! And Jonson! Hurry up and cover for Cecil. ...We don’t have much time left!”

“Mate, as long as you understand what that means.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Neshinbara saw Jonson take a leap back from Noriki and open the long cases hanging down from either waist. The white vapor of cold air escaped and Jonson stuck his hands in and pulled something out.

...A sword!?”

“Audience, do you know what the miracle that creates finalists is?”

Jonson held up the objects before he could land.

“Humans can travel 100 meters in less than ten seconds. This was possible even during the Age of the Gods. Afterwards, humans began to wonder what methods they could use to improve on that record while still using the human body. This is one answer to that question.”

He held the answer in his hands as he flew through the air. In one hand was a liquid-filled glass cylinder over a meter long. In the other was a long piston that resembled a sword.

“Doping.”

Jonson inserted the piston into the cylinder and leaned forward as he landed. He spun around the syringe he had created and placed the bottom of the piston against the ground.

“This is my 100-Meter Poetry.”

He leaned forward into a crouching start. The motion pressed on the cylinder and the liquid was injected into the poet’s body with a dull noise.

“...!!”

Every blood vessel on Jonson’s body bulged as they were pushed out by the bundles of muscle swelling out. Sweat poured across his body in an instant and the steam of high body temperature rose from his body and flowed from his mouth.

“Overflowing lyrical inspiration!”

He deepened his forward crouch and removed the empty syringe. Immediately afterwards, Jonson took a seemingly gentle step forward and used his entire body to launch himself forward.

“Energy explodes within the language center of my brain!”

The bottoms of his feet printed countless words referring to speed and running.

“The heart instantly burns with passion.”

He seemed to fly forward.

Each step was a leap taking him several meters and he swiftly twisted his body around as if leaving it to the steam rising from his entire body. He spun backwards as he threw a roundhouse kick toward Noriki.

“Break through, youth!”

Noriki held his piece of lumber up to block the kick.

“Kh!”

But Jonson’s youth destroyed the lumber. It was not simply smashed. He threw his kick as if using his foot as a blade and opened a perfect gap in the center. Jonson circled around a second time and threw another roundhouse kick into that gap.

“You, that is outside the course.”

The jabbing strike knocked Noriki toward the cargo opening.

Jonson used the recoil of the kick to jump forward and rushed toward Urquiaga without bothering to turn toward the sound of Noriki crashing into the outer wall of the hole. Jonson then heard the voice of the enemy strategist coming from behind him. The strategist gave a simple instruction.

“Urquiaga-kun! Get out of here!”

Neshinbara thought. Urquiaga could not move properly due to the weight and any injury from Jonson would be a meaningless loss. It was best to have the half-dragon evacuate, but that left only Neshinbara himself.

...Is there any way to break free of this situation?

There was. He wrote up his thoughts.

<The approaching curse and the words were smashed.>

He could not completely destroy the curse, but he could create an opening. That just left quickly attacking Shakespeare and...

...I have to stop Dudley from finding Balfette-kun with her mirror!

He turned toward Shakespeare, but saw a new light.

<<Foolish Lady Macbeth. Once married to her husband, his ambitions resonated with her and burned within her. She assisted in the assassination of the king, but...>>

But...

<<She feared the king's ghost and ultimately sank into the darkness and died.>>

A shadow clearly shaped like a woman stood between Shakespeare and Neshinbara. It stood there as if mocking him, came apart just as Macbeth had, and rushed at him as if trying to drape over him.

“...!”

Neshinbara attacked this new enemy, but he did not end there.

<He continued striking all of his enemies. The barrage never ended or let up.>

He added in a description to set the attack as continuous. Macbeth was behind him and Lady Macbeth before him, but the repeated attacks prevented them from

standing. With his enemies unable to move, Neshinbara began to run toward Dudley.

However, the light had yet to disappear. The light came from behind Shakespeare who blocked the barrage of attacks with a barrier of words. Those glowing letters created a certain form.

“...Eh?”

Neshinbara saw a great number of shadows. This was not just ten or twenty; there were hundreds of them. They all resembled trees but held swords and shields.

“The army of Birnam is targeting you, Macbeth.”

“Macbeth? But the curse hasn’t...”

Before he could say “reached me yet”, Neshinbara realized something. Words were spreading out in a spiral at his feet.

“Even if the role itself cannot possess you, someone must take on the role once it has been defeated,” muttered Shakespeare. “When the time comes, the spotlight will choose the next actor.”

Neshinbara was illuminated by a ring of light and he turned toward the army of Birnam that took a step toward him.

“How did you obtain enough Blessings to use a spell that emits so much writing!?”

“Curious?”

Shakespeare casually pulled something out of her paper bag. Its silhouette resembled arm armor, but it was actually a shield made of white and black objects.

Neshinbara gasped when he saw the form of that shield which was wrapped in dull bluish-white light.

“A Logismo! Oplo!?”

“Testament,” replied Shakespeare. “This is England’s Logismo! Oplo ‘Aspida Phylargia’. I have no intention of calling myself one of the Eight Great Dragon Kings, but it is a nice weapon. After all, the normal drive simply acts as a shield and the overdrive is quite simple as well. It merely takes all of the bearer’s pain and suffering and provides it to them in the form of ether.” Shakespeare nodded. “That of course applies to the attacks you send my way, but I am constantly receiving a much, much greater attack. Yes, you too have taken part in that attack before.”

“You mean...?”

“Testament. I refer to criticism.” Shakespeare suddenly raised her chin and looked into the sky. “Neshinbara Toussaint, you were born in Tres España, lost your parents in a battle with Hexagone Française, and for a variety of reasons, moved to Musashi before entering elementary school. During your second year of middle school, you entered a contest for a student novel prize held by the Testament Union. You won the prize for short stories and gathered attention for setting a record for the youngest winner. Your story was published in a Testament Union literature magazine,” she said. “But ever since, you have never released a book or had another short story published in a magazine. All you do is create doujinshi and write as a critic. Why do you no longer write?”

That question caused Neshinbara to gasp.

...*Well*...

He wanted to say something. He had been busy with school. Creating doujinshi was still writing. He had been especially busy with the student council lately. There was a lot he wanted to say. However...

“Why?”

That word came from a face expressing no emotion. The spotlight illuminated her as she stood in front of the army of Birnam.

“Without ever seeing how I work or how much preparation I put into my setting, you said the settings of my stories are weak. You said my stories include contradictions, plot holes, and other problems, but you never explained where or how. You simply made your criticisms without letting anyone question you. And...” She took a breath. “You said my methods are wrong. You denied the fact that I make a living like this. This is how I live.”

“ ... ”

Wait, thought Neshinbara. Why is she discussing criticism here?

She lightly raised her glasses and stared at him through the lenses.

“You are free to feel however you like about my works. When you get down to it, reviews are nothing but logical descriptions of the critic’s thoughts on the work. They simply give themselves more persuasive power by speaking logically about the emotions the work created within them. Reviews give a logical explanation of the portions that drew out some kind of response, so they only show one side of the work. However, I doubt you would agree with that. I doubt you think your reviews are just one possible correct answer. Yet you use words which are an imperfect tool for expressing one’s thoughts, so you had to have initially understood that everyone who reads a book will feel differently about it. Of course, when pursuing the perfect description of something, you cannot give up and use vague statements that could mean anything. That is one hard part of being an author. Do you understand, Neshinbara-kun? This is what I’m trying to say.”

She held up *Aspida Phylargia*.

“Your attacks supply me with power and your writings will not reach me.”

As Shakespeare gave what sounded like a declaration, the play began to move.

<<Oh, Macbeth.>>

<<Macbeth, the time has come to make up your mind.>>

...She's trying to shake me!

She was inside the play she had set up. This was Macbeth. She had given that discussion on criticism in order to make him the same as Macbeth who made up his mind, attacked, and died despite knowing he could not stand up to his foe.

According to the Testament descriptions, Shakespeare's style was to include a lot of the characters' mentality and psychology. By doing the same here, she had wrapped him up in it. However...

“Kh!”

Neshinbara did not think it was over yet. The situation was still progressing and there was something he had to do.

Shakespeare's words would likely cause people to doubt him. He had plenty of excuses for only acting like a real author, but what she had said was true. He would have a hard time clearing away those doubts.

...But this is no time to worry about that!

Neshinbara shouted in his heart and tried to move. However...

“Oh, I forgot to say one thing. ...Or rather, I forget to ask one thing.”

What was it?

“Did you know Tres España's previous chancellor and student council president Carlos I left behind a secret religious institution to raise children before they reach school age? It had connections to Henares's special department, it was split between athletics, culture, and religion divisions, and it gathered orphans from across the country to prepare for Tres España's economic crisis and decline.”

“What about it?”

“Thirteen years ago, that institution was destroyed from within. The teachers in control of the three divisions put their children through harsh training, argued over who should have overall control, and fought each other in an attempt to correct the other divisions. However, all of this was set up by some of the children.”

“What happened to those children?”

“They ran away, but most of them were caught and executed because they were said to be possessed by demons. The remaining children managed to escape and moved to the slums or to other countries.” She took a breath. “The institution was known as the 13th Mutsugoirei Academy. So have you heard of it?”

Upon finishing her question, Shakespeare’s expression changed for the first time. The corners of her mouth bent up like bows.

“Neshinbara Toussaint. Neshinbara is your family name and Toussaint is your given name. And the register of names spells that given name in kanji to indicate you belong to the Far East,” she said. “It is spelled with the kanji for thirteen.”

“...!”

Neshinbara shuddered.

<<Prepare yourself, Macbeth, for you have lost all of your divine protection.>>

The strings of text undulated as they were crushed by the repeated attacks Neshinbara had set up.

A clear sound rang out and the sign frame Michizane was using scattered through the air as fragments of light. Michizane moved in surprise, but Neshinbara could not turn around. He could only focus on the smiling girl before him.

“I finally found you. Can you remember our time back then, No. 13?” Her voice rang in his ears. “You hurt me back then too!”

In front of him and behind him, Macbeth and his wife stood up. The army of Birnam began to loudly advance. Army boots and armor formed an ensemble of noise and Dudley's voice joined it.

“Cecil!”

“I see her...”

“Eee! There's nothing to enjoy about looking at me!”

As Dudley set Cecil's aim, Neshinbara made up his mind. He shouted out to an automaton he had sent a divine text to just before arriving here.

“ ‘Shinagawa’! Do it now!”

At the same time, he typed.

<He fired an impact.>

And...

<He fired it into his own left side.>

The string of text which had been Macbeth wrapped around his right arm, but he tried to shake it off.

“...!”

The impact he himself fired knocked Neshinbara through the air.

His body creaked and a few of the fingernails on his left hand split or even came off entirely. Even so, he blasted himself to the right, toward the open hole a piece of cargo had come from.

“ ‘Shinagawa’!”

“Judge!” came the reply. “Reaccelerating and turning to the left! Over!!”

With those words, everything moved. A great enough acceleration and turn occurred that everything was thrown through the air.

Musashi entered a cruising formation with Shinagawa at the front and it used the gravitational acceleration to turn to the left. This was all according to Neshinbara's instructions. On his way here, he had sent divine texts with instructions for "Musashi" and the other automata.

"By reaccelerating to approach England and forcing ourselves into a turn, we can begin our circle around England earlier than scheduled!"

This action was similar to overturning the game table. To put it another way...

"We invalidate this match before the enemy can bring it to an end!"

This last resort eliminated the idea of winning or losing.

On Neshinbara's signal, Musashi took forceful action and the eight ships began turning to the left and to the north at high speed.

Even with the buffering control, low screams of the atmosphere rose from the eight ships and white cirrus clouds occasionally trailed behind the pointed edges of the ships.

They rotated.

On the battlefield on top of one of those ships, Neshinbara fell inside the diagonally tilted hole as if it was welcoming him inside. With steam rising from his entire body, Jonson ran to the starboard side and loudly clicked his tongue.

"You! How dare you use such a forceful method!"

Jonson thought with the clearly heightened thought speed the doping gave him. England had won each individual match, but this high speed turn was forcing Musashi into its circle around England.

...We didn't do enough damage to stop the ship!

It would be dangerous for them to remain on board. Even if it was for a short period of time, Musashi was accelerating, so it could slip away from Grace's ship. If that happened, they would have no way to escape and would essentially be prisoners of war. If they were carried around England like that, they would bring shame to the entire country.

“Mates! We need to withdraw! At this rate, Musashi will slip away from Grace's ship!”

As he spoke, the ship turned to the north. They would soon gain control of the ships sliding to the right and turn them forward. After that, they only needed to continue north to gain their path around England.

England was clearly visible and well within reach.

They were approaching so quickly they could crash into it.

Everyone aboard Musashi, including those on the transport ship being towed behind, evacuated to the rear port side of their ship.

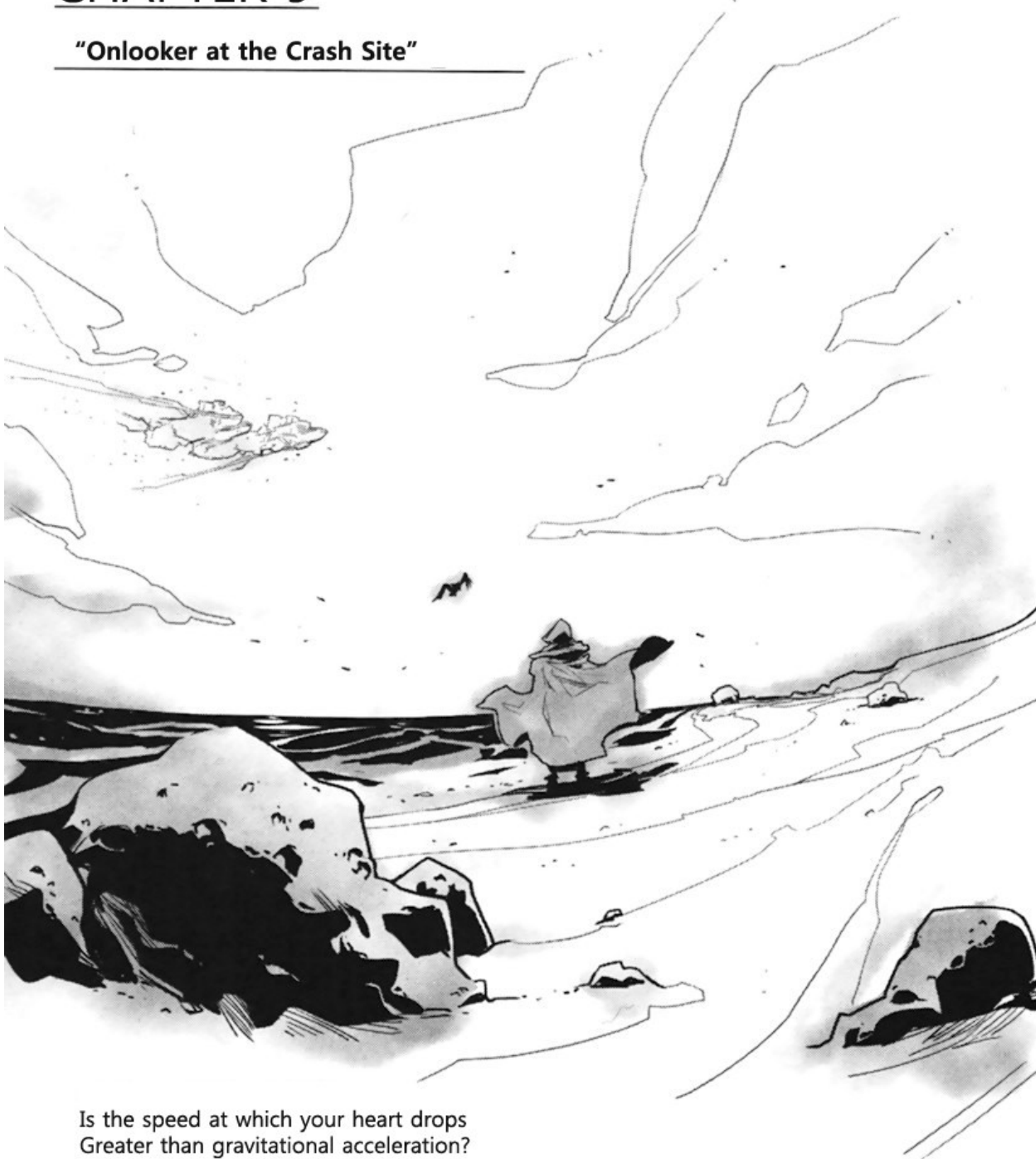
“Do whatever little you can to fix the tilt of the ships!!”

The eight ships of Musashi began a high-speed midair drift as they charged into the sky to the west of England.

Chapter 09: Onlooker at the Crash Site

CHAPTER 9

"Onlooker at the Crash Site"



Is the speed at which your heart drops
Greater than gravitational acceleration?
Point Allocation (Sensation)

Is the speed at which your heart drops

Greater than gravitational acceleration?

Point Allocation (Sensation)

Musashi's approach and turn were watched from England as well.

The approach of something as large as Musashi was dangerous, so it kept a low enough altitude for its deck height to be lower than England's foundation. From the cities on the upper level of England, Musashi looked more like a moving city than a ship.

From the southwestern coast of England, each building on Musashi's tilted surface was visible and they appeared to be flowing north at high speed.

However, the edges of Musashi's deck and a few of the buildings on its surface were trailing curves of mist from its high speed turn. Even its buffering control could not fully eliminate the atmospheric disturbance, so England itself shook.

England used the slight operation allowed by the structure of the floating island. They lowered the crust structure of England's four blocks and four levels to lower it to the east as much as possible.

The movement caused the shallow ocean surrounding the fourth level to spill off the western side. The scattered seawater formed a salty mist in the air at an altitude of two kilometers.

The mist of the atmosphere and the mist of the ocean mixed together and the air compressed between Musashi and England's western side roared as it flew further up into the sky.

Several hundred meter pillars and curtains of mist rose into the sky and the floating city tore through them.

The ship seemed to be following an evasive line that just barely avoided a collision course.

But Musashi did not eliminate the tilt from taking the corner so tight and it shot to the north with panicking speed.

If its speed dropped and it straightened out, it would crash into England with all that momentum.

And so it did not lower its speed and somehow managed to move its trajectory to the west. All the while, the residents of the fourth level's west coast watched Musashi. Those non-students lived off of what they could produce on the coast and nearby land. They stopped their work as Musashi approached and turned, but they could do nothing but watch.

And among them...

“Scarred! You need to get to safety! Even if Musashi is trying to evade and move around Ireland, who can say what fragments from the battle or the wind will do!”

A male voice cried out on the white beach where the horizon between the shallow ocean and sky was visible.

The voice belonged to a crow. Specifically, a crow with three legs. He wore the navy blue coat of a school uniform and hopped across the beach on his three legs toward the lean figure standing on the edge of the water.

This figure he had called out to had the Urban Name of “Scarred”. Scarred wore a green hooded cloak and wore a fetter with a chain connected to a metal stake.

The tide was very far out on the shallow ocean before Scarred. The sand and bedrock at the bottom were visible and the fish were leaping from the water's surface. And in the sky...

“ ... ”

Fish spilled over the outer edge and into the sky. They were then blasted up along with the sea mist where they ultimately fell onto the beach.

The crow turned toward the sporadic fish beginning to fall around them.

“My, my. This is an excellent catch, Scarred! This is quite an auspicious occasion...”

The crow trailed off because Scarred’s hood was turned toward him.

Scarred leaned forward and picked up the metal stake at his feet. He glanced at Musashi in the distance, used his empty hand to pull a thick book from his pocket, and opened the book.

“Judge. So they are travelling around England. I suppose Grace will be sent out. Not only does she use a high-speed ship, but the north is her land. I decided to fish before heading to the graveyard today, but...”

“But?”

“Judge,” said Scarred with a nod.

The face visible below the waving hood had a sword scar travelling from above the nose to the left cheek. His neck as well as the hands and lower arms visible in the cloak’s sleeves all had a few white scars from cuts. Meanwhile, Scarred flipped through the pages of the book.

“Milton, I never thought Musashi would pull off the same fishing method I accomplish with spells. I suppose this saves me some Blessings. No...”

Scarred turned away from Musashi’s approaching city as the wind and noise shook his long cloak. He raised his right hand which held the metal stake. Several firefly-like bluish-white spheres of light clung to that hand.

“This method is not particularly smart.”

Scarred swung down the hand holding the stake and the floating spheres of light vanished.

“Return.”

As if in response to that word, the raging sea and wind behind him suddenly calmed.

In an instant, the sea and wind became as still as if Musashi were not passing by.

“Very good,” said Scarred and the gentle waves stopped at his feet.

Milton gasped as the ocean grew still before his eyes.

The pillars of water and visible ocean floor were gone and nothing but gentle waves approached. And this was despite the wind from Musashi still being present.

“What spell was that?”

“The spirits of the ocean and wind seemed troubled as they spilled over the edge. Spirits cannot take actions that exceed their rules, after all. I only had to call out to them with a spirit spell. The great number of sympathizers increased its effects, yet it used fewer Blessings than what I usually use fishing. But,” said Scarred, changing the subject. “Milton, I want to go to the graveyard now, but have you heard that odd noise for a while now?”

“A noise?”

The crow named Milton held his wings above his forehead and twisted his three legs to look around, but he heard nothing beyond the low rumbling of Musashi’s passing.

“I have great familiarity with the wind, but I cannot hear anything beyond Musashi and its surroundings. Scarred, you often worry too much, so are you sure this is not an overreaction to Musashi’s approach?”

“Judge. You may be right. And...are you always this calm, Milton?”

“Ha ha ha.” Milton proudly puffed out his chest, clenched his right wing, and smacked his chest. “A man like me could not run this fourth level if this was enough to disturb him.”

“Judge. I suppose so. You were quite calm during the recent birth at Sail’s house. You began praying to the Testament in a corner of the room during the crucial part. The midwife said it helped a lot that you stayed out of the way.”

“Ha ha ha. I am quite popular!”

Milton laughed, but he looked up at something in the sky.

It was something that should have been impossible.

Three straight white lines suddenly became visible in the sky beyond Musashi. Milton realized what they meant.

“Shell fire!?”

Shells which were impossible for Musashi or England to have fired suddenly appeared in the western sky.

Three shots travelled toward England and Musashi which was trailing mist. They all produced the sound of lightly scraping at the air.

“Scarred!” shouted Milton.

Scarred quickly turned around and cried out when he saw the same thing.

“Low-speed anti-ship shells!? Only a large ship can secure the speed needed for those!”

But the doubt in his voice formed words of protest in the next moment.

“Has an enemy ship with stealth ability arrived near England!?”

As he spoke, a few different things happened. First, enemy attack sirens began blaring on Musashi and England.

“...!”

And second, the anti-ship shells made to break through armor struck Musashi while its surface was expanded for gravitational cruising.

Two shots coming from an unknown ship struck from close range.

The various sounds of destruction combined into a single noise that exploded into the sky from Musashi's port side.

In the instant the shells struck and damaged the ship, most of the ships' command authority was transferred to “Musashi” for the gravitational cruising. The natural equality of the automaton's nature made her slow to react to the emergency situation.

“I cannot deploy the gravitational barriers in time! Transferring power to the inner anti-shock buffering! Over.”

As soon as a decision was made in the automaton's controlled common thoughts, the first two ships on Musashi's port side were struck and the front port side was damaged.

The roaring and shaking indicated two shells had hit. The remaining one flew above them, but they had taken two direct hits.

As those two shells penetrated into the ships, the impact transformed and split open the ships. This destruction smashed the front port side on the outer wings that had been deployed in the switch from gravitational cruising to inertial cruising.

The front outer wing on Asakusa's port side and the rear outer wing on Murayama's port side had been deployed to act as a shield protecting Musashi's side, but their shape was greatly distorted by the impact of the shells.

The outer wings were a dozen or so meters wide. The impact and destruction bent them, but their frames prevented the force of the shells from escaping. The giant wings bent in around the hole created by the shells and the inner frame bent and twisted. The people who had evacuated to the port side reacted to the advancing damage.

“Low-speed shells are big and heavy! Has Tres España built a stealth-capable ship large enough to fire them!? And did they send one here at high speed!?”

No one could answer that question because no enemy ship was visible in the sky. But despite not having an answer, the damage continued.

The ship continued to be destroyed.

The distortion of the frame created cracks as if the outer wall and inner shell were being torn off the ship. This cut off the supply of ether allowing the ship to buffer against the impact. This produced an obvious result.

“...!?”

As the people watched, the inner shell and armor of the wings shattered like glass.

And once that armor and shell were easily destroyed, the wind burst inside, widened the cracks, and expanded the range of the destruction by blowing up the inner shell like a balloon.

“Get away from the port side! Here come the outer wings!!”

Air resistance caused the outer wings to dance like they were flapping and only the twisted inner framework remained.

“Brace for impact!!”

And the wings struck the port side.

A great noise rang out and intense vibrations scattered everywhere.

The basic structure in the center of the ship was protected by the impact buffering that used gravitational barriers, but most of the inner armor bordering the outer wings had been destroyed.

At the same time, the contents of the ether fuel supply lines and other circulation systems spewed their contents out of the destroyed areas and into the air. The high speed and altitude caused those contents to transform into mist and smoke.

The wind danced and the sky let out a groaning cry. In an instant, Musashi's port side was covered in trailing white mist and smoke, but something else happened overhead.

The third shell had passed by above Musashi. It was clearly targeting the middle portion of England, so England intercepted it. The ship-wide warning from "Musashi" described it.

"Ether reaction detected on Anglia, the top level of England! The output pattern matches their mainland defense spell sword, Ex. Caliburn! Everyone, brace for impact! Over."

What those words meant arrived immediately afterwards.

It was light.

An instantaneous beam of light literally stabbed toward Musashi from England in the distance.

The light which swept through the sky was shaped exactly like a sword.

The blade that came from the center of England was about twenty meters wide and two meters thick.

However, it was long enough to cover the sky.

More than ten kilometers existed between the center of England and Musashi, but the light arrived across that distance.

“...!!”

The tip of the sword swept away the flying shell with a horizontal attack.

The wind pummeled Tama on the port side where Asama saw the light and muttered what she knew about it.

“Ex. Caliburn is the foundation of England’s defense and it can cut open any target.”

Its edge was not all that sharp, but that meant the sword itself and the massive shockwave it produced would smash apart the target. Plus, it had a spell effect.

“The target will not fall into England. It will be knocked away!”

Exactly that happened before their eyes.

The pressure from the sliced atmosphere ruptured and sent the attack toward Musashi rather than England.

“...!!”

The cascade of air struck Musashi as if raining from the sky.

An immediate decision was made concerning the body press from the sky.

“Musashi” lowered the altitude of the port ships which had been moved back for the turn. The explosive pressure coming from diagonally up on the right could be handled by sending the starboard ships forward and up.

That formation was meant to keep the shock from rolling Musashi toward England.

In the very next moment, the shadow of the long glowing sword passed over Musashi’s third starboard ship.

“...!”

A white light appeared on the surface of that ship.

As the atmosphere was torn by Ex. Caliburn, it struck Musashi’s buffering.

The air was compressed by its own weight and momentum, so a massive and sudden explosion of mist appeared above Musashi.

The white mist appeared above the second central ship as well and the white pressure struck almost all of Musashi’s eight ships from above.

However, the white cascade appearing over the rising third starboard ship instantly grew in thickness and let out a roar as it spilled over the edge of the ship.

The mast split the flood-like waves of mist and the roofs of the city finally appeared as if rising from the depths of a flood.

The ship rumbled and let out a shaking roar.

However, the white tsunami flowing backwards split widely apart.

The school building of Musashi Ariadust Academy had broken through the white pressure.

“...”

And just as everyone thought they were through, the explosive pressure struck something else.

It struck the transport ship connected to the rear of Okutama by a towing belt. And something happened to that towing belt.

“...!?”

One of the lines holding them in place suddenly snapped. The belt that burst was the one Gin had attacked earlier.

With one point of support gone, the transport ship swerved erratically through the sky.

“...!?”

Many people let out cries of confusion as the ship quickly collapsed to the right.

“We need to straighten out! At this rate, the towing belt will drag us into Takao’s surface!”

The destroyed towing belt had been attached to their port side, so the transport ship quickly tilted toward Takao on the right.

Everyone exchanged a glance, wondering what to do.

“Chancellor!” cried Futayo’s sharp voice. “Do I have permission to cut the other towing belt!? I wish to cut this ship free of Musashi!”

Futayo left the decision up to Toori. That was the proper thing to do when a superior was present. However...

“Oh?”

Futayo looked to the starboard edge to which Aoi had been tied with a rope.

However, Aoi was nowhere to be seen near the deck railing where the rope had been tied.

Only the end of the rope attached to the railing remained.

The other end was hanging over the edge of the deck beyond the railing. When Futayo noticed the rope swinging as if something heavy were attached to the other side, she frowned.

“I never thought I would be the first to discover the body.”

“Futayo!” shouted Masazumi from behind her. “What is it!? Is Aoi not there!?”

“Masazumi... The chancellor is certainly there. But perhaps I should be using the past tense now.”

“What? Where did that idiot get off to!? Honestly, and I just saw him a second ago standing on the railing pretending to be sailor!”

“No, um, Masazumi. Please listen to me. Even if you have indirectly committed murder, I am on your side. I promise I will testify on your behalf in court.”

“Judge, judge,” said Masazumi who was looking around and clearly not listening. “He really has disappeared. Futayo, I will make the request as vice president. Please cut the port side towing belt. Aoi may be gone, but we can explain the situation later.”

“Judge. Please look over there for a moment, Masazumi.”

“Hm? Over there?”

The instant Masazumi looked to the stern of the ship, Futayo approached the railing with an acceleration spell and cut the rope’s knot using Tonbokiri without bothering to check below. Futayo nodded as she saw the rope dance through the air in its fall.

“The evidence has been destroyed. Problem solved!”

“Did something happen, Futayo?”

Not wanting to leave a scar on her friend’s life, Futayo gave no response. Instead, she turned toward the port side towing belt and swung up Tonbokiri.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!”

The cutting power flew through the air and severed the towing belt. An instant later, the bent towing belt whipped back into place.

“...!”

That and the inertia from Musashi sent the transport ship into a high speed swing to the starboard side. It was thrown toward England’s coast.

As soon as Musashi left the cascade of mist, “Musashi” rechecked the situation from the bridge in front of the academy.

The light of Ex. Caliburn had disappeared from the sky.

And the transport ship was falling toward England’s coast.

However, her processing ability was at its limit controlling the damaged port side and handling the buffering control against the atmospheric pressure wall striking the starboard side from above. She could not also save the transport ship, so she chose the best option given the circumstances.

“...!”

“Musashi” sent data on England’s surface to the transport ship. On top of the data supplied by England, she added the area the transport ship could land at. That was...

...The coastal area on the fourth level!

She looked up and saw the transport ship shake and suddenly fly forcefully toward England.

The great pressure of the wind had hopped over the large wall that was Musashi and knocked the transport ship to the side. With the previous momentum of the towing belt swinging it around, the transport ship fell diagonally toward England.

“Musashi” understood she had no choice but to leave the situation to those aboard.

“...?”

But she suddenly heard a voice from below.

Despite the wind and shaking of the ship, someone was climbing up to the bridge.

“Oh, Konishi-sama and the others from the Commerce and Industry Guild. What are you doing here? Over.”

Konishi was a representative of the Commerce and Industry Guild as well as a member of the provisional council.

He raised his eyebrows and spread his arms in protest.

“You have to ask!? What do you intend to do about the damages to our goods and barriers to future trading!? We do intend to cooperate with Musashi’s student council and chancellor’s officers.” Konishi spread his arms even wider as he stood at the head of the group. “But ‘Musashi’-dono, who is responsible for this battle!?”

Toori fell naked from the sky and into Konishi’s arms.

He had likely fallen when the transport ship had been knocked away earlier.

But when this naked boy with a rope around his neck fell with an audible impact, Konishi’s veins bulged out as he fell into a sumo wrestler’s crouch and struggled to catch him.

“Waaaaah! ‘Musashi’-dono! A naked boy just fell from the sky!”

“Oh? What are you doing here, Koni-tan!? And this is a repeat gag!”

“Musashi” determined Toori would have preferred a fresh gag in which Konishi failed to catch him. She then turned to Konishi.

“All responsibility lies with him. Feel free to send any complaints to him. Over.”

She then turned toward the corrected course she had sent the transport ship.

“Judge. They are on course for the coast on the fourth and lowest level. Over.”

“Eh? They’re crashing!? Where, where!? Wait, Horizon’s with them!”

“Judge. We can no longer see them from here,” said “Musashi”. “But judging from the time, they have two more seconds. And they have landed. Over.”

Just before the emergency landing, Scarred and Milton had noticed the transport ship falling toward the western coast of England’s fourth level. They were urging the residents of a nearby village to evacuate. There was a slim chance the ship would crash there, fragments could fly that far, and...

“An earthquake or ley line disturbance could create a fault in the grown crust! Just like always, hurry to the central plaza! Remember to turn off any sources of fire before leaving! Milton, you lead the way. I will check the site and return once I’m sure it’s safe!”

Milton bowed and Scarred parted ways with him and ran out of the village. The fetter and chain on his right leg rattled as he did. In the sky, the transport ship was falling with white mist trailing behind it. However...

“House #23 here is the last one. These temporary evacuations would be easier with someone who could use a sign frame. Not that I’m one to talk,” said Scarred in self-derision.

He continued on past the final house of the village.

Several bulges appeared on the ocean next to him and water-colored horses poked their heads above water. It seemed they were evacuating from the area the ship was falling toward, but a few turned back toward him, shaking their manes made of seaweed.

“Scarred. Hurry?”

“Judge. This is a bit dangerous, so go play over there!”

“Okay. Scarred. Honest.”

“Scarred. Always. Listen.”

“Play?”

The young horses began to climb onto land to play with Scarred, but the parents bit their manes to stop them.

Scarred smiled a bit at that.

But as he ran on, he heard a sudden voice from behind. He turned around to find the resident of #23. She was a banshee with wet, messy black hair and her white face was even paler than usual.

“Scarred! My children are over there!! They have yet to return from the other side of the hill!”

Hearing that, Scarred ran even faster. The banshee’s voice seemed to follow him.

“They said they were capturing crabs where the water gushes out!”

“Judge,” said Scarred with a nod and a glance at the metal stake in his right hand. This was enough. He hurried to the other side of the beach and a hill rose up to the right.

“The other side of that hill is just in front of the inlet graveyard. Will I make it in time? It’s been a while since I used spells for anything other than fishing and healing...”

He ran up the hill while the ship seemed so close overhead he could reach out and touch it.

And as he ran as quickly as he could, he saw something.

“Is that them!?”

He ran down the hill and arrived at a beach where the rocky ground was exposed in places.

“The rocks around here grow quickly. It has a lot of leaks and caves that water passes through, but it also crumbles easily.”

On maps, it was labeled as a dangerous area.

However, an area too dangerous for the adults to go had a way of becoming a hunting ground and playground for the lighter children.

And the children who could be called small hunters were there.

Below the falling shadow and above the sand were three small forms frozen in fear as they looked up.

“...!!”

A loud voice could be heard from the falling ship.

The ship would have known this was a dangerous area that people avoided. That was likely why they had chosen it. From how tilted the ship was, they must have used their limited time and position to desperately steer the ship away from the nearby village.

However, three children had been playing in the blind spot created by the hill.

The ship was trying to do something about it, but there was no time to steer the ship out of the way.

“In that case...!”

As he ran, Scarred held the metal stake forward in his right hand and pointed it toward the falling ship. He held a thick book up in his left hand and read through the text.

“Sorry, but I will blast you out of the way!”

The transport ship was filled with confusion.

Everyone had noticed the children on the coast below them and they were all reacting in their own way.

The first to react was Ohiroshiki who had been forcefully brought along to play the role of a tank.

“Ahhhh, little girls! Ahhhh, little girls! That’s two out of three! 66.666666...”

“What are you talking about!?”

“N-no, it is much too rude of me to get so excited just from seeing the little girls! C-c’mon, Tenzou-kun! You’re a ninja, so use your explosives to self destruct and blast this ship to smithereens! All the old hags and men must die! The little girls must live! Oh, but make sure I survive!”

At least a dozen nearby fists struck Ohiroshiki.

Meanwhile, Mitotsudaira opened a sign frame and tapped on Futayo’s shoulder.

“What is it, Nate-sama?” asked Futayo as she turned around. “Do you wish to schedule an assisted suicide concerning the coming scandal?”

“Far Eastern feudal knights really like bloodshed, don’t they? At any rate, Naomasa sent me some advice from Musashi, so let’s do what we can on our own. I don’t know if we can actually pull it off, though.”

“We will see that when we try.”

Futayo took a step forward to lead Mitotsudaira, but then she turned around.

“Where are we going?”

Mitotsudaira smiled bitterly, passed a sign frame to Futayo, and quickly explained the process. The two of them then ran toward the bridge.

They opened the front hatch in the bridge and made their way to the staircase leading into the ship.

“Futayo, if this works, our respective rulers should be happy.” Mitotsudaira took a breath. “Everyone is doing their best! We will do the same!”

By the time Futayo and Mitotsudaira ran inside the ship, everyone aboard was preparing for the impact of landing.

They were fixing the objects on deck in place with rope and carrying the injured to the stern.

They had little time, but everyone moved quickly as the ship shook and tilted. Masazumi placed a hand on her mouth as she carried Horizon to the bridge.

“Ten more seconds! Everyone, brace for impact!!”

The ground was visible down to the front and left of the ship. The children on the beach were now hidden from view by the ship.

Masazumi wondered what was going to happen, but she decided to trust Mitotsudaira and Futayo.

“...!?”

On the starboard edge of the deck, Tenzou was tightening the stay supporting the mast. As he did, he noticed movement down below.

Someone was running in from the starboard side on the ground.

The figure wore a long hooded cloak.

Ether light was visible around the staff-like object the figure held up in their right hand.

...Are they planning to use a spell or something? From the ether light, it must be quite a powerful spell. But...

The spell would have to cause a great impact to either knock the children out of the way or instantly knock the transport ship out of range. An inertial control spell would also be ended, but a high level combination of spells like that would need the help of a charm or multi-step preparations.

However, the running figure did not appear to be using either. Most of England's fourth level was treated like a slum, so most of its residents had not received religious divine protection.

“In that case, is this one of the ancient spirit spells passed down within England?”

It was a primitive method and the user did not have strict control because it borrowed the power of spirits which were ether with a will of its own. However, certain spirit spell users could draw out tremendous power.

“Are they planning to hit the ship and knock it off course!?”

The instant Tenzou grasped the figure's intent, he took action. He knew what he had to do based on this person's decision.

Scarred ran toward his target location as the sand seemed to grab at his feet.

He sensed the shadow and pressure of the ship overhead and the thick atmosphere between the ship and the ground created a wind that gently pressed against him.

But Scarred did not hesitate as he ran toward the children about twenty meters away.

“Get down!!” he shouted.

He adjusted his grip on the metal stake such that he grasped the very bottom and held it up as if trying to stab it into the crushed bow of the falling ship.

But in that instant...

“Eh?”

Scarred first noticed that his body was floating as he tried to carry out the activation ceremony.

For an instant, he did not know why.

But understanding came a moment later.

“Who are you!?”

Scarred realized someone was carrying him away.

He did not recognize the person. A boy in black clothes and a hat had tackled him in the gut.

It was as if the boy wanted to say Scarred’s actions were dangerous.

“...!!”

Scarred flew a few meters along with the boy.

The ether light in his right hand swelled a bit but quickly burst and vanished.

“Ah.”

Just as that wordless voice leaked from his throat, he was pushed further through the air. His back struck empty air and he reached out his hand, but he could not reach the children or the ship. He could only see the children standing motionless on the beach and staring toward him. The children suddenly looked up and...

“Scarred!!”

The transport ship crashed into the crust of the coast.

It began with an intense sound of stone striking stone. Next came two sounds of destruction.

The first was the sound of the transport ship’s bow bending and breaking as the bow slammed into the ground like it was stamping a giant seal.

And as the ship was destroyed, the other, slower destruction could be heard.

The crust crumbled.

As the ship stabbed into the ground, the grown earth was initially smashed in the shape of the ship’s bow. Cracks ran from there and passed by the ninja who was hurrying to a hill while carrying someone in a green cloak.

The ground crumbled.

The entire ship lowered as the bow stabbed further into England.

The beach was smashed apart, the rocks on the surface were ripped up, and the foundation below them split and crumbled.

The ninja ran while lifting and carrying the person in the cloak. He kicked off the ground that began to flow backwards.

“...!”

He threw his body and the cloaked person to the stable hill.

“ ... ”

The ship finally came to a stop while shallowly standing up on its bow.

All it left behind was a wholly changed landscape. The beach and the shallow ocean were gone. In their place was a slanted area of exposed bedrock several meters down. Water was beginning to flow into it.

And the children were nowhere to be seen.

From the beginning of the destruction to the very end, Tenzou had not taken his eyes off of it.

Even as fragments of wood had flown through the air and fallen nearby while spinning vertically, he had stood perfectly still while holding the hilt of the short sword on his back. If he took any careless action, harm could come to the civilian he was protecting.

And he himself felt a dull warmth near his right shoulder blade. A fragment from earlier had hit him and made a shallow stab wound. He was likely bleeding.

I am injured, but I am a ninja, thought Tenzou. A ninja's primary duty is to gather intelligence from other academies and to return alive from any situation, but protecting important people is another one of our duties.

Preventing people from other countries and other academies from coming to harm due to Musashi's participation would avoid future trouble.

...This is all part of my duty.

Tenzou checked on his surroundings.

...Things have quieted down. The destruction of the ship and the primary collapse of the crust have come to an end.

There was a danger of a secondary collapse, so the area was off limits to anyone without specialized knowledge.

...Well, that too is the duty of those with my specialization.

“...”

Tenzou took a deep breath and gathered strength in his body. He released the hilt on his back and stood up while holding his back.

And without taking his eyes off of the ship, he took an additional breath and spoke.

“Are you okay?”

As he stood up, he reached a hand down.

He reached a hand out to the person he had protected who wore a long cloak and had charged into danger on their own. However...

“...!”

A sharp pain and noise came from his left cheek hidden below the brim of his hat and behind his scarf.

He had been struck.

“!?”

With this sudden turn of events, he finally turned toward the person.

They wore a long cloak, but Tenzou gasped when he saw the hand which had struck him and the person’s cheek and neck below the hood.

He saw scars on the back of the person’s hand, their wrist, their lower arm, from their nose to their cheek, and on their neck.

...Those are from swords.

Not all of the scars had been made with sharp blades. A lot of them were from tearing lacerations made by dull blades. The person's palm also had countless scars as if it had been torn by thorns.

...Is this person in charge of protecting this area?

He tried to say something. At the very least, he felt it may have been rude to reach out his hand and ask if they were okay. He opened his mouth to speak, but the other person spoke first.

“What have you done!?”

That sharp cry left Tenzou speechless.

He also noticed something glittering as it flowed down the person's cheek below their hood.

“ ... ”

Instead of saying something, Tenzou sensed the meaning of the hot pain coming from his cheek. He sensed what that slap had meant. But before he could grasp the details, the person quickly turned toward the ship and began to run toward it.

“ ... ”

The person then saw the state of the ship and the beach. They slowed their pace when they saw the beach beginning to fill with water from the ocean.

They came to a stop and stared at the ship. About a third of the ship was sticking into the crust and it gave off a slight creaking sound, but no one moved aboard the ship for fear of causing a secondary collapse.

The children were not visible where the bow had been.

The transport ship merely stuck up into the sky and Musashi could be seen continuing northward beyond it.

The person in the cloak watched that for a moment.

“ ... ”

And they began to collapse to their knees with a sigh of resignation.

But in that instant, Tenzou cried out toward their back.

“Look more closely!!”

The ninja’s shout brought strength back to Scarred’s knees.

The instruction from behind was telling him to “look”. That could hold several different implications in the language of the Far East and the liberal translation provided by Scarred’s divine protection made it hard to tell which this was.

But Scarred saw something from underneath his hood. First, he saw the ninja circling around to block his path. The towering form of the ship was visible over his shoulder.

On the deck of the ship standing vertical in the morning sun, five figures could be seen standing on the mast which extended horizontally.

A samurai girl carried a boy over her shoulder.

“We saved all three British lives!!”

A silver-haired girl carried a girl under each arm.

...Those are...?

Scarred did not know what had happened, but the children were unconscious.

“You...saved them?”

Those words escaped Scarred's throat and the ninja before him nodded.

The ninja merely looked toward him.

"That's certainly good," said the ninja with a sigh of relief.

Scarred felt his inner thoughts had been revealed, so he felt a meaningless impatience in his chest. Scarred looked back and forth between the unconscious children and the ninja.

"U-um..."

He was unsure what to say. Should he give his thanks for saving the children? Should he express his anger over crashing the ship here? Or...

...I slapped him and cried despite not knowing the situation.

He may not have known the situation, but he had still been hasty.

...But...

"Um, uh..."

The ninja had to have seen the ether light from the spell in Scarred's hand. He had to have predicted what kind of spell it would be.

...So why did he stop me?

With that thought, Scarred frantically shook his head.

No, thought Scarred. It is wrong to doubt him.

The children had been saved.

Scarred took a breath and shook his head again. He knew what he had to say.

...I'm sorry.

He prepared to say those words that held a number of meanings, but the ninja suddenly disappeared.

It happened so suddenly that Scarred did not even have time to say “eh?” All of a sudden, the ninja had vanished from the hill and could be seen running across the seawater beginning to fill the beach down below. He sent water splashing into the air with each step.

...Was that the ninja art of escape!?

Scarred understood why he had left. This was England and Musashi was in a delicate situation with the Testament Union nations. If the ninja disembarked without permission, it could be used as a negotiating card.

But Scarred called out for a different reason.

“Wait!” cried Scarred.

He had yet to apologize for acting hastily or thank them for saving the children.

However, the ninja was already running across the coast and back to the ship.

A shallow ocean had already formed around where the ship had sunk into the ground. It was cut off from the land.

As the ninja’s footsteps on the water’s surface approached the ship, Scarred took a step toward his back.

I look like a child left behind by their parent, thought Scarred.

“Please wait!”

Scarred had something he wanted to say. He just had to say it.

But he could not form the words.

“...!”

As Scarred walked across the grass, he noticed a certain color at his feet.

It was red. A trail of red dots led toward the ocean.

...Is this from that ninja!?

Scarred quickly looked up.

The ninja had protected Scarred from injury and then Scarred had made a hasty misunderstanding. But...

“He’s gone...”

The figures on the ship were gone as well. Instead, an emergency escape boat was floating in the seawater filling the area below the ship.

The three unconscious children were aboard the boat.

The only people remaining were Scarred on the grassy hill and the children.

Musashi’s steam whistle could be heard in the distance to the north.

Musashi circled England and sent out a ship to aid the crew of the transport ship and to carry out special negotiations.

While slowing down, Musashi completed a full revolution in half a day, but England instructed them to remain in the air south of England until they received permission to enter port.

But there was a reason Musashi could not respond simply by heading on to their next destination.

In the name of “investigating the damage to British territory”, England demanded the crew of the crashed transport ship remain onboard. England even cut off the nearby land with a concealment barrier.

This essentially took Horizon Ariadust, Honda Masazumi, Honda Futayo, and the rest of the crew as hostages. Musashi also had to repair its damaged ships, resupply with food and other goods, and carry out the trade with England they had agreed to, so most of those on Musashi agreed they should go along with England’s demand to wait.

But with the coming war with Tres España and Musashi’s anti-Testament Union position, England’s representative council could not agree how to deal with Musashi. The Trumps had been spread out across various areas of England, but the council decided they had to be called together.

Musashi’s negotiations earned them the assurance of the human rights and protection of Musashi’s ruler as well as the removal of the barrier around the transport ship after three days. However, ley line protection prevented the transport ship from being contacted by divine transmission and those aboard were forbidden to leave England so that further investigation could be carried out.

England provided supplies for the transport ship, but because “England is short on goods with the approaching war”, “England feared an uprising aboard the ship”, and “the distribution could be left to those inside”, the supplies were kept to the bare minimum. For the most part, it was only food and clothing.

The transport ship could not contact Musashi and those on board had to make use of their survival training. However...

“They’ll be fine. I’m *really* worried about Horizon and I want to tell someone to do something about it, but most of the people I tell to do something about stuff are over there. There’s no point in trying to do something about it from here. We just have to do what we can so they don’t get too lonely and hurry up our negotiations to land in England.”

Those instructions from Aoi Toori led to a few different actions aboard Musashi.

First, the school announcements were played over Musashi's external speakers to provide the transport ship with a link to their normal lives. They also attempted a unique communication method based on a code using Musashi's steam whistle.

Next, they completely eliminated the transport ship's existence as a negotiating card as they negotiated with England for the right to land.

And a week after the transport ship's crash, the transport ship finally sent back an awkward transmission using a light. Once Musashi knew everyone onboard was safe, they decided to grow more assertive in their negotiations.

But at the same time, the Trumps were gathered from around England and Tres España prepared for the war with England.

Musashi and England both received two pieces of information from their respective information networks.

First, Tres España had finished assembling their invincible fleet known as the Grande y Felicísima Armada.

Second, the large stealth ship which had attacked Musashi had not been seen within it.

Time was already approaching two weeks since the transport ship's crash.

Chapter 10: Hopeful People with Nothing to Do

CHAPTER 10

"Hopeful People with Nothing to Do"



Can you use the phrase
"Below the umbrella"
And not hide?

Point Allocation (Chatting Over Tea)

Can you use the phrase

“Below the umbrella”

And not hide?

Point Allocation (Chatting Over Tea)

“Well? How is the transport ship doing, ‘Musashi’-san?”

The rooftop of the school at the rear of Okutama created a broad area with an unobstructed view of the sky. Two figures were exchanging words there.

One was a man passed middle age and the other was an automaton dressed as a maid and pouring tea for the man below a paper parasol set. The automaton, “Musashi”, spoke as she poured the black tea from a small teapot and into a teacup.

“Sakai-sama, this is a local Darjeeling. It is expensive, so make sure to savor it as you drink it. Also, perhaps you could close your newspaper. Close it now. I will not tell you a third time. ...Judge. Very good. At any rate, this tea is expensive, so I have determined you should give your thoughts on its flavor. Over.”

With a nod, she held out the teacup. Sakai frowned a bit.

“Do I really have to give my thoughts on it if it’s expensive? I don’t think the price has that much to do with the flavor.”

“Judge,” replied “Musashi” with a single nod. “Unfortunately, an automaton’s sense of taste is merely a passive sense based on chemical reactions. It is difficult to determine if a flavor is good or not. However, price is a representation of value, so I have determined that is an accurate standard, assuming the market is not filled with falsehoods. Additionally, the trust in the British market makes it a high-level standard. As for flavor, we automata mostly accumulate records, reproduce food and drink based on those records, gather the reactions of those

who eat or drink them, and use those accumulated reactions as a basis for how to make something delicious.”

“But you sometimes give me things that are nowhere near delicious.”

“Judge. You noticed, Sakai-sama? We also must accumulate data on unpleasant flavor or the balance of our knowledge will collapse. And it is you that eats the food, not me. Over.”

“Oh, c’mon. That’s just mean. Does that mean half of everything I eat is going to be disgusting?”

Sakai then glanced over at England to the north.

“Anyway, let’s get back on topic. How is the transport ship doing?”

“Judge. It is in British territory, so the surrounding area is in a state of quarantine so the locals cannot contact them. The 87 people aboard the transport ship are imprisoned within the ship and the nearby land so England can question them, but England shows no intention of performing that questioning right away. Bertoni-sama predicts that questioning will be addressed in the negotiations. Over.”

“I see,” muttered Sakai.

Suddenly, he heard a shallow vibration from the stern of the ship.

“_____”

The steam whistle blew. A low, thick noise that one felt shallowly in one’s skin continued for about five seconds.

“...? Is it just me or has Tamako been blowing her whistle really weirdly from time to time? What is this?”

“It is a response to the transport ship. Over.”

More specifically...

“The transport ship has prepared two lights with a deep umbrella over them. They ask questions using a blinking code. The code is quite simple. One light blinks one to five times to indicate the vowel and-...”

Toori’s head suddenly poked up from below the edge of the roof. He looked around and spotted the two on the roof.

“I know how to say ‘boobs’ with it! Okay, that’s all I wanted to say. President, “Musashi”, don’t bother changing the channel. I-...ahh!?”

An arm wearing a track suit reached up from below, grabbed Toori’s hair, and pulled him down out of view.

“Eh? What’s this, sensei? You actually crawled up the wall after me? You must really love me to-... No, don’t throw me down! Today’s the day for non-burnable trash, so wait until Monday, Wednesday, or Friday!!”

“Musashi” gave a quick wave as the voice disappeared and she nodded expressionlessly.

“Toori-sama has become very strange during his separation from Horizon-sama. His abnormality is on the verge of boiling over. Over.”

“Wow, that’s the first time I’ve heard you make a joke.”

“All I did was say ‘over’ after saying ‘over’. Over,” said “Musashi” in confusion. “To continue, one of the lights indicates the vowel and the other indicates the consonant row. Over.”

“Judge. And we respond with the steam whistle, is that it? Do we not use the lights because England would see them?” Sakai began counting on his fingers as he recalled the whistles he had heard. “A long whistle means yes and a short one means no. Any time it blows twice or more, it’s usually a random dummy signal, but a single long tone followed by several short ones is some kind of code.”

“How did you know? Over.”

“Because the first one last night was long. The very first question is definitely going to be ‘can you see us’, right? Our response was a long whistle, so that has to mean ‘yes’. Also, no complex response is needed to answer yes or no questions. That means all of those are dummy signals except for the ones that repeatedly use a fixed noise after a beginning sign.”

“Judge. That is very logical. When we have an urgent matter, we begin with a long tone and send the message using only the number for the vowels. Over.”

“I have an urgent matter to send-... Y-you’re too fast, sensei!! At least let me say it has to do with Horizon’s boobs! No, wait! That’ll kill me!!”

“Musashi” waved her handkerchief and Sakai nodded.

“Judge, judge. So they’ve been asking awkward questions and we’ve been giving yes or no answers.”

“Tenzou-sama came up with their method using the lights. Over.”

“I wonder if they’ve caught on.” Sakai turned toward England again. “Well, I guess they aren’t saying something to show they aren’t completely hostile toward us.”

“The problem lies in Masazumi-sama and Futayo-sama’s presence on the transport ship. Musashi does not have its negotiator and vice president or its divine weapon user and vice chancellor, so our negotiations with England are not going well.”

“Who’s in charge? Neshinbara? He’s a literature type like Sakakibara, so he’s pretty eloquent.”

“No.” “Musashi” shook her head and held up her right arm. “The curse of Macbeth has attached to Neshinbara-sama’s right arm, so he is currently suspended from his duties. It seems he attempts to harm his king whenever he tries to do anything. Over.”

“Oh, right. The curse of Macbeth. Can’t Asama-kun purify it?”

“Judge.” “Musashi” nodded and tilted her head while looking at her raised right arm. “From what I have heard, it is not technically a curse. It seems he has been given a part in a play, so it cannot be purified. Plays are dedicated to the gods, so any purification attempt is repelled. It also seems it will fade away and disappear if he leaves England. Neshinbara-sama says he is busy and wishes to make the most of his suspension, so he is not showing up at the academy either. The negotiations are currently being led primarily by Bertoni-sama and Augesvarer-sama. Over.”

“Hm. So Neshinbara was cursed and now he’s ‘busy’? I see,” muttered Sakai.

“What is it that you ‘see’? Over.”

“Well, y’see...”

Sakai slightly adjusted his position in his chair.

“I feel like Innocentius right now,” he commented with a bitter smile while taking a sip of his tea. “Tres España attacked, right?”

“Musashi” turned a surprised look toward Sakai.

“You mean you are already starting to forget? Simply put, I believe you need your brain modified by the ship’s IZUMO Institute. Over. Now, to continue...”

“Wait a second, ‘Musashi’-san. Don’t skip right past my tsukkomi phase.”

“Musahi” ignored him.

“Your brain is of low priority as far as I am concerned, so I shall continue on. The surface areas, the transport ships, and the towing belts have been left in a terrible state, we were struck twice by an undetected ship, and that later attack was also what led to Ex. Caliburn pummeling us. When one seeks someone to blame yet finds nothing, the spiral of thoughts leads to what I believe can be expressed as ‘anger’. Over.”

“Well done. And that is an emotion that will be turned our way quite a bit, so it’s worth remembering.”

“Judge. So that is what one refers to as ‘feelings of gratitude’. I have a lot to learn about humans. This is not logical at all. ...What is with that look, Sakai-sama? Oh, is that gratitude? Over.”

“Enough of that. ...Anyway, you just mentioned what Tres España did to us, right? That’s what has Neshinbara so ‘busy’.” Sakai let out a breath and looked up at the sky outside the parasol. “Neshinbara was the one in command during the attack.”

“Musashi” nodded in response to Sakai’s words.

“Judge. I see your memories have returned. Well done. ...Now, what do you mean? I have determined Neshinbara-sama’s command and plan produced excellent results. Over.”

A smile appeared on the corner of Sakai’s mouth and he pulled a kiseru from his pocket.

“But you just said the transport ships, towing belts, and surface areas are in a terrible state. And there was the second attack.”

“Damage was indeed done, but it was necessary. Most residents had already moved underground and most of the damage was done to Takao, Oume, Musashino, and Okutama which have non-residential buildings such as stores and companies on the surface. There was little damage to people’s homes,” she said. “The damage from the later shells was outside of our expectations, but no one could have predicted Tres España would have a practical stealth ship. Plus, that entire battle was unexpected. As such, his handling of the attack was the best anyone could have done. Over.”

“But we’re stuck here, Musashi is falling apart, and our people are injured and separated from us. It was more of a loss than a win. The original battle was closer

to being a tie, so we tried to earn a win by showing off the speed of our gravitational cruising to say we could fight back and could not be caught. But...”

“We ended up showing we could fight back but could be caught? Over.”

“Judge,” said Sakai. Low in the sky ahead of them were the eight ships of Musashi and something was visible on the port side. “We can’t fully repair while floating and without more supplies. We can’t use our gravitational cruising right now and can only continually show off how weak we are. And with some of our people separated from us, the burden has been falling on the representative committee and the 2nd-year committee. On top of that, Musashi’s residents are getting impatient since we can’t choose when we negotiate while England has their hostages. Also, the emergency rations don’t taste very good.”

“Judge. From what I can see on Musashi’s divine network, more and more people want to land at England or move on to the next port. We had plenty of reserves for food and other goods, but it is still only enough for three weeks. The personal indulgences are beginning to run out. Bertoni-sama has bought the trading inventory of the other merchants and sent those goods into the marketplace, but some of those will have to be sold at a loss. Over.”

“While belonging to the student council or chancellor’s officers, a merchant can make a lot of money with their authority. ...The other merchants will probably overcharge Shirojiro so a young merchant like him doesn’t use this emergency to grow too powerful. And who is it that created this situation?” He took a breath. “Tres España started it and England prolonged it, but Neshinbara is the one responsible on Musashi.”

“But this was an unanticipated-...”

“If I told you not to underestimate people’s feelings, would you find it unfair? Unfortunately, that’s the only answer I have. This was unexpected, Neshinbara made no clear errors, and this result may very well have been the best possible. You might want to ask the people complaining to do better themselves.”

Sakai took the lighter for his kiseru from its case. The end of the small, folded charm had small red flames hanging down as if it were ink the charm had soaked up. He placed the charm over the kiseru's opening.

"But...Neshinbara was the one in charge."

"..."

"Even if it was all unexpected and even if he did the best he could, men like to hope for too much. And when you hope for too much of a past event, you end up with doubts similar to regrets. You begin questioning your every action. Neshinbara is probably looking over the records of that attack again and again. And if he thinks he's found something he could have done better, he'll get depressed."

"That sounds like he is not looking at reality. Over."

"You only experience reality once, but you can enjoy looking back at something as many times as you want. If something enjoyable happened in the past, you want to do it again in reality. But if something bad happened in the past, you want to think it was not as bad as you thought, so you go back to it again and again."

"Do you do that as well, Sakai-sama? Over."

"Well." Sakai returned the lighter to the case around his neck and let smoke out into the sky with a bitter laugh. "That's pretty much all I do."

"Judge. Is Mikawa one of the things you think back on? Over."

"You have a lot of questions today, 'Musashi'-san."

Sakai sat up straight, but continued on to lean forward. He rested his elbows on his lap and held his kiseru at cheek height.

"If Neshinbara isn't busy, I'd like to ask him some things about the Double Border Crest."

“The Double Border Crest,” muttered “Musashi” as if rolling the words around in her mouth. “Have you asked Asama-sama about it? Over.”

“I already have a lot of examples like Asama-kun’s. After asking about the people who have disappeared and the circumstances surrounding their disappearance, you end up hearing the same pattern again and again, so there isn’t much point. And when I try to directly ask the temple about it, they say they aren’t allowed to tell me anything.”

“Is the temple keeping the information secret? Over.”

“I can’t figure out why. Asama-kun’s father told me what he knows, but it seems the instruction to remain silent on the issue came from pretty high up. I really don’t want to think about how high up you have to get to control a major temple like the Asama Temple.”

“I see two possibilities,” said “Musashi” as she tilted her head. “Either this silence is meant to conceal some kind of truth or the temples do not know the details and the silence is meant to prevent confusion from spreading through the people. I suggest the latter. Over.”

“Why? The former is more exciting. Everyone loves uncovering hidden truths.”

“If they knew the truth, they would be handling the problem in some fashion. If they knew the details of this strange phenomenon causing people to disappear, a solution to the problem would come first and foremost. They would also need to inform people how to avoid the disappearances. As they are hiding it and not guiding the people to safety, I can only assume they know nothing. In other words, the order of silence is meant to hide their own incompetence. Over.”

“You’re pretty harsh. But if they did know the details, it is true they would make the details known, dispel people’s fears of the Apocalypse by solving the disappearances, and improve Shinto’s reputation in the process. ...After all, this is apparently a problem occurring all over the world. After England, we’ll probably visit Izumo, so maybe I can look into it there.”

“Judge. You are curious, aren’t you? That is a good thing. It is much better than spending every day wandering around Musashi and reading in the bookstores without buying anything. Instead of doing that, how about you watch the Black Disk box set of Dangerous Decameron you ordered. ‘Okutama’ is still holding on to it for you. Over.”

“Well, it turns out I bought the sequel More Dangerous Decameron and one of the duo is almost never there.” Sakai let out a puff of smoke. “Well, I want to give Neshinbara time to think, see the people around him making a fuss, and come to his own decision. His surname is based on Sakakibara’s, after all. I can’t have him saying nothing of importance and disappearing like the real one did.”

Sakai then glanced over at “Musashi”.

“Don’t you have something to say about that?”

“No, I do not have the necessary knowledge to comment on your friends. I do wish I had the same level of familiarity with you as the Kazuno that occasionally comes up in your stories. Over.”

“Having two of her would do twice as much damage to the world. You’re fine the way you are.”

“Judge,” she said with a nod.

“Well,” began Sakai while puffing out more smoke. “If Neshinbara finds an answer, I can ask him about the Double Border Crest then. England is a good spot for that.”

“England is?” asked “Musashi” with a tilt of the head.

Sakai nodded and breathed in.

“Spirits and non-human races are easily affected by the moonlight. That’s because-...”

“That is because one of the two moons is made of ether crystal. It is said to have been created long before the Age of the Gods when humanity had yet to ascend to the heavens. What about it? Over.”

“Because England is the country of spirits and non-human races, its research into ether and ley lines is more advanced than any other country. It’s also partially due to joining with Izumo and acting as a neutral party between the Far East and the other countries during the Harmonic Unification War, but they were the ones to come up with some of the names like ATELL. And the strange phenomena come from disturbances in the ley lines.”

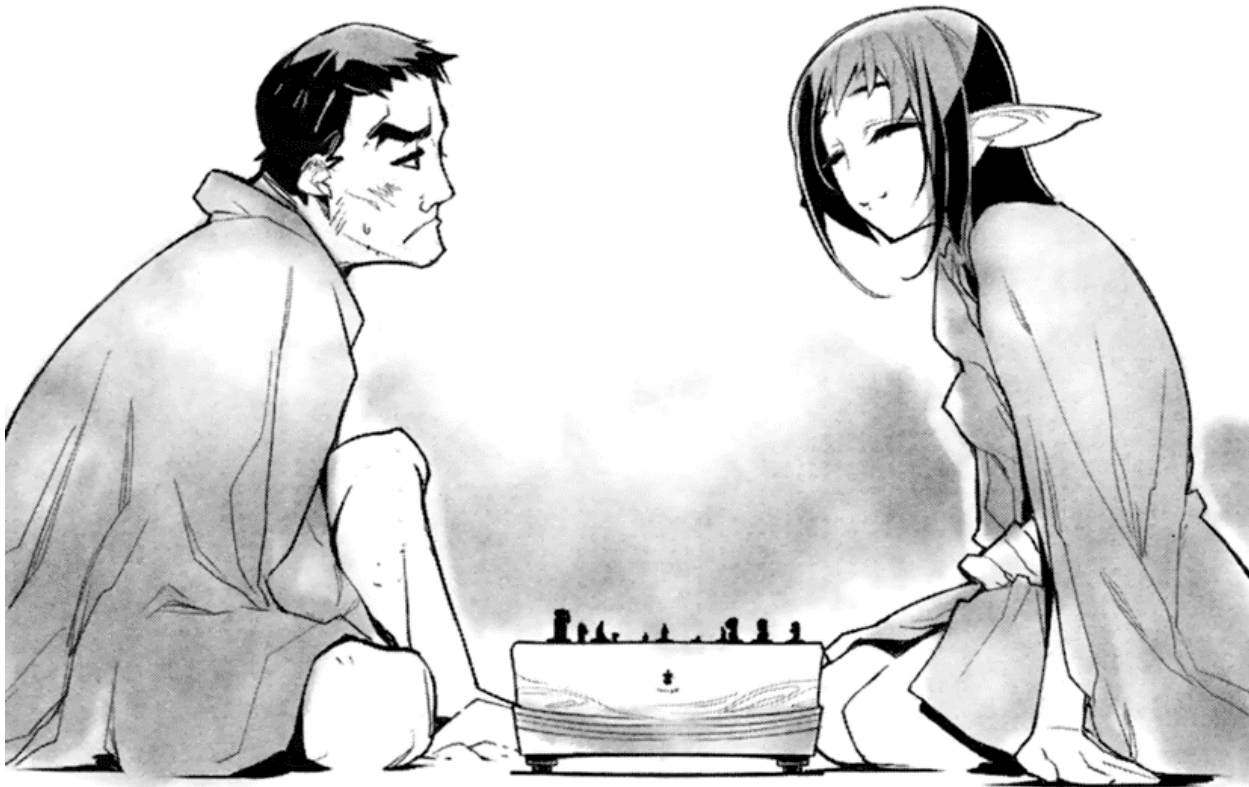
“You think there will be a hint concerning the Double Border Crest and the Princess Disappearances in England? Over.”

“I don’t know,” said Sakai. “I’ve looked into a lot of this like I’m a student and I think there’s a chance. England is definitely worth checking out, especially the royal family.” He took a breath. “In the past when people have been spirited away in England or Europe, they were caused by spirits. And the current leader of England is the Fairy Queen. ...What is going to happen in England? And how will Tres España handle their attack?”

Chapter 11: Groups of National Leaders

CHAPTER 11

"Groups of National Leaders"



What should one do
Before facing each other?
Point Allocation (Pace)

What should one do

Before facing each other?

Point Allocation (Pace)

The afternoon sun entered a room on the western side of a residence with eaves. The large Japanese-style building sat next to a pond and two figures sat with their foreheads facing each other in a tatami mat room decorated with awards and trophies for the baseball team and track and field team of Tres España's Alcalá de Henares.

The two spoke while sitting on the tatami mats with sheets wrapped around their naked bodies.

“Fusae, in the attack on Musashi, shouldn't I have gone forward at this point?”

“You could have done that, Taka, but that would have left an opening in the back which normal students would have had to fill. Bringing everyone out like that is fine if we were going to settle things there, but I avoided sending you out because it didn't look like we would.”

“Hm.”

Takakane nodded and stared at what lay between them.

It was a chess board. However, three battlefields created from the wood and squares were connected vertically and they were labeled “Musashi”, “Transport Ship”, and “Command Ship”.

“The biggest problem was Ju being stopped.”

Fusae picked up the queen sitting on the back of the command ship and used her fingernail to press the crest carved into the bottom that allowed her to change its settings. A *cadena firma* made from crosses and the San Mercado logo appeared above the piece.

“I certainly didn’t expect Musashi’s chancellor to appear there.”

She put down the piece and the squares on the board between the queen and the transport ship all emitted a blue light.

She did the same to the knights on either side of the queen and the light increased.

“I wanted to go all out from the beginning. Our goal was to make a powerful assault, but I sent Ju out to give ourselves a political victory as well. I thought we could use that to make a quick victory and get out of there. I never thought Ju would make such a girlish scream.” Fusae thought for a moment. “Hmm. I guess using people like objects isn’t the way to go. I need to think of them as people. Some say you can never know what will happen when people are involved, but that ignores the idea that people are unpredictable animals and still doesn’t look at them as people. ...I did some of that myself this time, so I need to rethink how I do things. Maybe I was a little too full of myself after our victory in the previous war against Hexagone Française.”

Fusae leaned forward and placed her forehead on the chess board.

“Taka, aren’t you going to comfort me?”

“It was your mistake. Once you make up for it, I’ll comfort you plenty for any sadness left over.”

“Y-you make it sound somehow dirty.” Fusae raised her head, but her smile was a bit lacking in strength. “Anyway, do you think I’m better at commanding than I used to be?”

“That’s a difficult question.”

“Testament. So I’m hopeless, is that it?”

“Why do you always try to hurt yourself like that?”

“I can’t be hurt now that I have this body. And the last one to hurt me was you,” said Fusae with a smile.

“Y’know,” began Takakane as he folded his arms. “That was part of the history recreation.”

“Testament, testament. Women are fine with just the fact itself, but men always need an excuse.”

“Hmm.”

This time, Takakane placed a hand on his forehead and thought. He could not come up with anything to say and color returned to Fusae’s smile.

“Well, we achieved a lot of our political goals in the attack, so that’s good enough. They got away, but we didn’t lose. And we got two shell hits in later. At the very least, the other countries won’t be able to label Tres España as the loser. That will help out Tres España as a whole and it will give meaning to the exhaustion and injuries everyone received.”

“I don’t entirely get it, but is it really that important?”

“Testament.” Fusae nodded and picked up a piece from the chess board. “Let me explain. This will involve Tres España’s future as well.”

Takakane folded his arms as he stared at the pieces lined up on the chess board in the afternoon sun.

“What is Tres España’s plan for the future?” he asked.

“Testament. Ju would be able to give the best answer, but she can be a bit tight-lipped. Anyway, my view is that the Armada battle is going to happen before too long.”

“The one we lose? Of course, we intend to make it an effective win by staying on the retreat.”

“We are preparing for that, but things are heading toward the Peace of Westphalia due to Musashi’s actions in the name of saving the world from the Apocalypse. The countries which had previously been hesitant will begin to act because Musashi has.

“And the country with the most to gain from Westphalia is Hexagone Française, the winner of the Thirty Years’ War. Also, Holland, Switzerland, and Sweden have their independence recognized and England indirectly benefits from the conclusion. So many countries will be involved in the Peace, but Musashi’s password of ‘saving the world from the Apocalypse’ will drag even more countries in: Qing, Russia, and others.”

Takakane frowned at those two countries mentioned.

“But Qing and Russia have nothing to do with Westphalia. Are we supposed to accept importation of ramen and vodka because of the Apocalypse? Then again, we already have ramen. The tonkotsu kind.”

“You mean Founding Emperor Ramen? Our paella shops are having a hard time against that place. ...Anyway, I’m sure those countries will show up to make it an ‘international conference’. Musashi’s participation itself is an interpretation. Officially, the conference will recreate history, but it may also have an unofficial side that leaves no records. That will cover saving the world from the Apocalypse and determining whether Musashi was in the right or not.”

In that case...

“We need to change our focus and think about how to take as little damage as possible in the armada battle. Also, we need to think about how to actually gain an advantage while maintaining an ‘interpretative loss’ of the battle. We only have about half a year to come up with something before the Peace of Westphalia on October 24, but I doubt England will give us any longer to think than they have to.”

“Then when will it happen?”

“That’s up to England which is the worst part. I’ll explain that, too.”

“Now, then,” said Fusae as she slid aside the chess board sitting between her and Takakane. She attached another board vertically and pointed to one corner. “This board is England, okay? And this one is Scotland.”

“And?”

“Chancellor Henry VIII made England Protestant under the Anglican Church, but Scotland disagreed and remained Catholic. ...Now, Mary Stuart was the queen of Scotland, but she was forced to flee to England where she was imprisoned on the charge of attempting to assassinate Elizabeth.” Fusae removed her hand from the board. “One of the causes of the Armada battle is the execution of the Catholic Mary Stuart.”

“Our leader sure has an exciting reason to go to war.”

“Well, it’s part of the history recreation. Plus, this is just one link in the chain of conditions leading to the battle. Tres España has essentially been waiting for its chance to attack, but we made too many warships meant to be used in the Seto Inland Sea during the Battle of Lepanto. That’s made it difficult to secure the wartime harbors we need and to create the Grande y Felicísima Armada made up of ships meant for the open sea. However, England has been putting off the execution of Mary.” Fusae opened a *cadena firma* which displayed a list of England’s representatives. “And they created an organization known as Trumps which is made up of their representatives. I’ve heard the name comes from the fact that the king on playing cards is based on Elizabeth’s father, Chancellor Henry VIII, or the fact that the mark for the suit of clubs is based on Excalibur. That’s why Excalibur takes the place of 13. Also, the vice chancellor and vice president are both counted as 10, so there is no 11.”

12. Chancellor: Elizabeth – Also Student Council President. Fairy Queen and user of Ex. Caliburn.

10. Vice Chancellor: Robert Dudley – Skinny woman. Testamenta Arma user.

- 10. Vice President: William Cecil – Fat woman.**
- 9. Secretary: Ben Jonson – Black athlete poet. President of the literature club.**
- 8. Assistant Secretary: Nicholas Bacon – Hammer user and trickster. Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England.**
- 7. Treasurer: Charles Howard – Naval admiral. Wealthy common sense man. No combat ability.**
- 6. Thomas Shakespeare – Logismoi Oplo user. Half-lived race. Vice president of the literature club.**
- 5-1. Francis Drake – Hard Wolf and naval vice admiral. Essentially the commander. Testamenta Arma user.**
- 5-2. John Hawkins – Drake’s companion. Swimsuit man.**
- 5-3. Thomas Cavendish – Drake and the others’ underclassman. Mermaid woman.**
- 4. Grace O’Malley – Female Pirate of Scotland. Elizabeth’s friend.**
- 3. Christopher Hatton – Lord Chancellor and Living Bones.**
- 2. F. Walsingham – Automaton leader of the public morals committee. Spymaster.**
- 1. Walter Raleigh – Far Easterner. Elizabeth’s wartime advisor.**

“That sums it up. ...Why are you so quiet, Taka? Can you barely contain your desire to fight?”

“No.” Takakane tilted his head and poked at the list. “Unlike us, they’re mostly literary types. One disappearing ball pitched underhand by a Valdés and they’d be dead, don’t you think?” He paused for a moment. “Also, there are a ton of truly strange people in this list.”

“I was trying to decide if I should say that or not.”

“And it’s more of a monster land than I imagined. It’s like an animal kingdom.”

“I was thinking about saying that too.”

“I’m glad we’re relatively normal.”

“I’m not sure outsiders would see it that way.”

“Hmm,” they both groaned while looking down.

They remained motionless for a while, but Fusae finally clenched her fists near the floor.

“I-I need motivation.”

“He! Na! Res!”

“Ohh!”

The two of them synchronized and regained strength of will, but then Takakane relaxed his sitting position again.

“But there’s nothing we can do if England decides when it begins.”

“Isn’t that why we attacked Musashi?”

“What do you mean? I thought that was meant to show our position to the Testament Union and to gain the right to speak to Musashi in the later conference.”

“There was more to it than that. And the success of that attack should let us guide the armada battle to its beginning. They won’t have solved the mystery of our strongest ship, San Martín, so we should have the advantage in the battle.”

“Y’know,” said Takakane. Fusae tilted her head and Takakane scratched below his short hair. “You really look like you’re enjoying yourself when you talk about strategies and tactics.”

“Testament. I decided to never fail again. I deeply immerse myself in it and enjoy it so I won’t fear failure. That’s very Tres Españan, don’t you think? It’s often said we use the money we have, give in to our passions, have a party, and forget everything unpleasant.”

Fusae placed her hands on the floor as if stretching forward.

The chess board between them was the one used to explain England’s situation.

“Did you realize why I slid it to the side?” she asked while looking up at Takakane.

“Because we can’t win,” he said expressionlessly.

He went on to raise his arms and tumble backwards in a pose of resignation. Fusae laughed, slid up to him, and lowered her head over his, but she heard a sudden voice from the garden.

“Ah! Wah! Brother! Fusae and the team captain are having an impure couple’s relation!”

“Foolish sister. Your brother has some advice for you: when they are married, it is not impure. It is simply obscene.”

“Shut up, Valdés siblings. Why are you here?”

Takakane looked up and saw the siblings wearing track suits.

The younger sister, Flores, raised both hands with a carefree smile.

“Why are we here? Well, um... to mooch lunch off of you!”

The Valdés sister proudly puffed out her chest.

“Fusae said she found a good restaurant, remember!? Y’know, the food union’s Paella Emperor! It’s supposed to rival Founding Emperor Ramen!”

“Fusae, a chain restaurant doesn’t count as good.”

“But you can stick around forever with the orange juice. It’s a product of Valencia.”

“That’s right! Girls need a place to chat! ...Oh, but we didn’t know you were searching for a new way to take your afternoon nap with the captain. Speaking of which, what would you call this method? A fork!?”

“Sister. Why would you want it to drop? Personally, I would go with a slider, but you need to calm down. ...Anyway, what do you say, captain?”

“No thanks, you idiot. It’s kind of creepy when you show up so suddenly.”

The brother turned to his sister, but the sister was already staring strongly up at him.

“Did you hear that? He called you an iidiot! An iiiidiot!”

“Sister, the captain is a tsundere. You need to understand that. As such, I am now certain I have his trust.”

“You don’t have to keep up the idiot act, Valdés... Now, you two,” said Takakane. “Have you ever hit a literary type with a pitch?”

The siblings both froze in place for an instant. Finally, the brother turned to his sister. But she averted her gaze and shook her head back and forth.

“N-no, I’ve never done anything like-... Brother, don’t put your hand on my shoulder! I haven’t! Really, I haven’t! The ball slipped from my grasp is all! That idiot may have been photographing the girls’ practice, but it was an accident that I hit him square on! ...But to be honest, it did feel really good.”

“You don’t have to confess anything, Valdés sister,” said Takakane with a sigh.

“Anyway, captain,” said the brother. “The real reason we are here is because the chancellor has apparently disappeared. He hasn’t come here, has he? Lady Juana is searching for him, but can’t seem to find him.”

Takakane tilted his head and turned to Fusae. She was clinging to him while buried in the sheets so the Valdés siblings could not see her face, but her long ears were bright red. When he saw her head shake left and right a bit, he lightly embraced her back.

“She says she hasn’t seen him. Oh, but Valdés.”

Both the brother and sister looked up in confusion. Takakane jerked his chin toward the entrance.

“I’ll search for him today, but ask Velá next time. You can contact him by his handheld.”

“Velázquez?”

“Testament,” said Takakane with a nod. “He and the chancellor have known each other a long time. If you ask him, he would find him by nightfall.”

“Well, if that’s done, I want to eat some lunch,” said the sister.

“You heard her, Fusae. Get up all ready.”

“Make me,” said Fusae while lying completely limp.

Takakane sighed and pointed toward the Valdés siblings.

“Fine, then. I’ll contact Velá. ...One of those letters has come for the chancellor again, hasn’t it? Tell Juana he’ll be back by nightfall. Also, you two wait outside. We’ll be right out once I have Fusae ready.”

Takakane looked away from the Valdés siblings, looked toward Fusae, and then looked up in the sky. The blue sky of early afternoon seemed to stretch up forever.

“There are problems no matter where you look. If Musashi wants to deal with those who live on the ground, they have to do things our way. They’re probably discussing England and us right about now, but that’s only going to get worse. This is getting dangerous.”

He sighed and lowered his shoulders.

“And England is probably having a meeting after gathering the Trumps.”

Four massive crust blocks floated in the air. The adjoining blocks were arranged with two aligned north and south and two to the northwest.

The floating island was located approximately three thousand meters in the air.

It was known as England.

Each of England’s four blocks had a narrow multi-layer structure on the upper level. The first level had the academy, the second had the cities, the third level was the broadest and it contained the farmland, and the fourth level was very thick and supported the others. The fourth level also contained the coast and a shallow ocean.

The blue sky lay above and the blue ocean lay below. The third level was mostly covered by the green of forests and mountains, and the wheat of the farmland spreading out below was also green. This was the season of colors for England.

The academy at the center of each first level functioned under the college system. The development around those formal and historic school buildings was built on the second level.

The central school buildings were protected by fortresses, but they had no classrooms. They were only built with a student council room, various living rooms, a faculty room, a library, a reference room, and other such rooms.

Among the four blocks, the largest central school building was the one on the first level of the southern block of England. It was Oxford Academy of Anglia.

The central school building was designed like a palace with a great hall and an audience room. It had a maintained nature park and a waterway, and it was currently filled with the light of midmorning.

As a school building and specialty facility, it was quiet and few people walked by.

Currently, two students with guard duty walked atop the thick fortress wall surrounding the school building on their way to the fortress gate tower. They were chatting as they walked along and looked toward the silhouette of Musashi visible in the southern sky.

The one to the front was a bigfoot beastman and the one in back was a lizard beastman.

“Spring is just about at its peak, isn’t it? How about you? Are you in your periodic puberty?”

The bigfoot continued speaking while pinching at the hair on his chin.

“It’s going to get hot soon, but I hate growing in my summer coat. But if I got my hair removed permanently, I’d be indistinguishable from an ogre. You have it easy there. You lizards are always so cheerful in the summer.”

“Don’t be stupid. Summer may be nice, but you can’t underestimate the heating costs for a lizardman to make it through winter. Last year, my old man forgot his portable heater on his way to buy some smoking tobacco and ended up hibernating next to the store.”

“Testament,” said the bigfoot with a nod. He did not stop walking. “I remember that now. We’re actually pretty delicate. In games, we always charge right at the adventurer, but that isn’t gonna happen. Why attack a penniless adventurer when you can work at a mountain hut? I’d rather use my strength to do some easy heavy labor and have the girls thank me than make painful memories hunting humans.”

“Testament,” said the lizardman with a nod. He pointed north with his rifle. “You should think about switching to the college in northern Scotland. The history recreation allows more interaction these days, so you shouldn’t have any trouble there.”

“I could, but you’d have to return the games, Black Disks, and Gold Disks you borrowed. Especially ‘Merlin’s Destruction of the Round Table for Dummies!’ That one’s rare, so I can’t have you never returning it. Also...”

The bigfoot looked through the sky from south to west while walking. To the south, Musashi was visible in the distance and the shadow of the Divine States was visible even further in the distance. And to the west...

“There’s the war with Tres España. I can’t go until that’s over.”

“Is that really anything to worry about? You saw Ex. Caliburn, didn’t you? As long as we have that, England can’t lose. ...Of course, it can’t fire repeatedly and it can’t be fired outside of England.”

“That’s why the other countries haven’t claimed it’s a weapon of mass destruction meant for invasion.”

The two lowered their gazes toward the front of the academy visible from the edge of the fortress wall they were walking along. Outside the fortress gate was the path to the city of London on the second level and an old fortress with tall towers in four directions.

That fortress was the royal residence known as the Tower of London.

The highest level of each tower had a hatch which could be opened or closed, so the inside was not visible at the moment. However...

“England’s royal and noble criminals are imprisoned in the Tower of London. Excalibur was relocated to the northwest tower and supposedly no one has ever pulled it from the piece of crust which acts as its pedestal. Rumors say its sword attack that protects England uses the power of the criminals’ confessions. The current prisoner is-...”

“If you say it, you’ll end up bloody. The English royal family has been dangerous for a long time. You know the history, right?”

“Yeah. England’s grudge began two generations ago in the age of Chancellor Henry VIII.” The lizardman stopped walking and slid his hand horizontally across his neck. “Well, according to my old man, Chancellor Henry VIII never even touched Ex. Caliburn. He always boasted about his ability to pull it out, he was known as the almighty king, and he apparently had connections with all sorts of countries, but he must have been aware he wasn’t qualified to be king.”

“Why not?”

“The legend of Excalibur says the one who can draw it is qualified to be king. If he ever tried and failed to draw it, he would lose the right to be king. He might have been afraid of that.”

As he spoke, the lizardman looked toward the southeastern tower of the Tower of London. Lace curtains hung in one of its windows and his gaze moved toward that white color.

“Can’t see her today.”

“The prisoner? Don’t tell me that’s why you took this part time guard job.”

“Testament. I’m from Scotland, after all. It gets so cold there that the heat expenses are no laughing matter.”

The lizardman suddenly looked toward the bottom of the fortress. He had noticed movement in the city. However...

“...?”

He stopped in place while looking down. The bigfoot frowned when he noticed.

“What is it?”

“Look,” muttered the lizardman.

A man walked along the path to the fortress gate.

He had dark skin, wore glasses, and was bald. A white tank top covered his tense body and rectangular cases over a meter long hung at either waist.

Each of his footsteps was accompanied by a metallic noise and he walked across the stone pavement with light steps.

“That’s the athlete poet and secretary, Ben ‘9’ Jonson,” said the lizardman.

“Does he have some business at our school building?” muttered the bigfoot. “The student council and chancellor’s officers have nothing scheduled for-...” He trailed off and corrected himself. “No, wait. The entire school building was made off limits today. We weren’t told, but there have been rumors for a bit now, remember? In other words, today is...”

He trailed off again.

Several other figures had come up behind Ben Jonson.

People walked up the stone-paved path. They were not gathered together. They were scattered in pairs or alone, but they were all headed to the same place.

The first one after Jonson was a Hard Wolf with a naval-style uniform.

“That’s the vice president of the ship club, ‘5-1’ Drake. He’s attacked Tres España’s New World fleets and given England enough money to rival a year’s budget. Despite being a pirate, he has the title of knight.”

Next to him was a young man carrying a three-pronged lance and wearing a racing swimsuit, cap, and goggles.

“He’s the captain of the ship club, ‘5-2’ Hawkins. As Drake’s colleague, he’s an excellent partner during wartime and an assistant who can carry out independent missions. He looks like a pervert, though.”

Someone was speaking to Drake and Hawkins via sign frame. Hawkins’s sign frame showed two women aboard a ship somewhere. One was a mermaid with her tail fin submerged in a cradle-like device that doubled as an aquatic bed and the device for controlling ships.

“The mermaid is the ship club’s manager, ‘5-3’ Cavendish. She uses all of her spells solely for controlling all of the club’s ships. I had thought she and the previous two had left for the New World after the attack on Lisbon, but it looks like they’ve returned here.”

A woman spoke with Cavendish while grabbing a donut from a pocket on the ship control device. She wore a hood and scarf with a woven ivy pattern. She was a dryad with ivy and leaves spilling from within her black hair.

“She’s the representative of Ireland, Grace ‘4’ O’Malley. Our queen calls her a friend and she protects the northern and western seas. She strongly scolds her husband, has a ton of kids, and lives a wildly free lifestyle, but she can be trouble when it comes down to it. She’ll charge into the enemy fleet with her quick, small ship and get real results.”

Behind Drake and Hawkins was a boy dancing lightly despite carrying a hammer in a giant case.

“That’s the head of the state club, Nicholas ‘8’ Bacon. He’s a trickster, the queen’s advisor, and he holds the Great Seal of England which gives him the right of decision.”

Behind Bacon was a man wearing glasses. He wiped sweat from his brow with a handkerchief and worried with his neatly parted hair.

“That’s the president of the ship club and the treasurer, Charles ‘7’ Howard. He can’t fight, but he carries out his duties as treasurer with his massive wealth and his great skill at using it. He owns the British fleet, but he leaves all authority concerning its use to Drake. He’s incredibly generous, so he even compensates any injured soldiers. He’s a powerful merchant.”

One figure walked a fair distance back from the others. He was a Living Bones who wore a cloak over his upper body. A necklace decorated with small compressed skulls hung around his neck.

“That’s the Lord Chancellor, Christopher ‘3’ Hatton. Not only does he judge people like crazy in trials, but he also rescues the souls of the people he judges. From what I hear, he’s searching for a way to finally rest in peace.”

And lastly, two figures walked behind all the others.



Walter Raleigh

F. Walsingham



Christopher Hatton

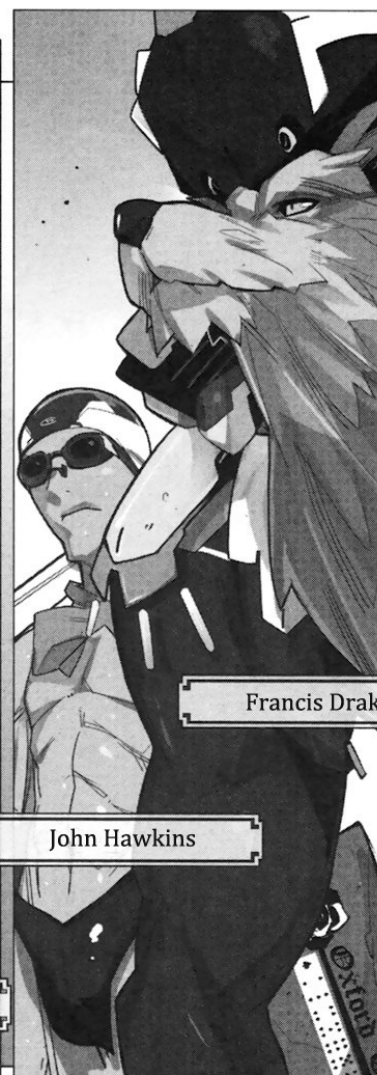
Charles Howard

Nicholas Bacon



Grace O'Malley

Thomas Cavendish



John Hawkins

Francis Drake

One was a Far Easterner. He had long bangs, broad shoulders, and a slender body. His casually worn uniform was equipped with several swords that were simply a hilt and guard. They had a cap attached rather than a blade. He carried another such sword over his right shoulder, but this one measured over a meter and a half long.

“Walter ‘1’ Raleigh. He’s a remnant of the Far Eastern Amako clan, but he instructs the queen’s army and acts as the queen’s wartime advisor. It seems his other Urban Name is Trident, but it was apparently given to him by a third party. He never speaks.”

The final figure walking alongside Raleigh was a female automaton.

She was a puppet. She wore a female uniform with the skirt and coat removed, but her arms and legs were not attached to her body. They instead moved along with the movements of two cross-shaped blades floating above her back.

“That’s the head of the public morals committee, F. ‘2’ Walsingham. She exterminates other countries’ spies within England while gathering information from those other countries using her own intelligence network.”

That was ten in all. The two beastmen knew what the total should have been, but they did not even exchange a glance.

“Vice President William ‘10’ Cecil and Vice Chancellor Robert ‘10’ Dudley, aka ‘The Two Tens’, are waiting inside the school building. ‘12’ is the queen and ‘13’ is represented by Ex. Caliburn, so the only member of Trumps missing is ‘6’ Shakespeare.”

“Why are they all here?”

“I don’t know, but I know who had to have called them in. It was-...”

Just before the lizardman could speak the name, a voice whispered in their ears from behind.

“That’s right. Our Fairy Queen, Her Highness ‘12’ Elizabeth.”

The two of them jumped in surprise and turned around.

A dark-skinned face wearing glasses was grinning quite nearby. The two of them stared at the morning sun reflecting off the glasses.

“Ben Jonson...”

“Just call me Ben, bros. I’m having a good time every night at the Mermaid on Cheapside, so stop by if you have time. Today, ‘6’ Shakespeare and the queen will be coming. You’re interested in royalty, aren’t you? Especially you, Torn.”

Ben turned toward the lizardman. He ignored the lizardman gasping at having his name spoken and turned toward the closed lace curtains on the southwestern tower of the distant Tower of London.

“She lost her last chance to avoid execution when she could not pull out Ex. Caliburn. Ah, I feel like my feet are about to recite poetry, bros.” Ben spread his arms, moved away from them, shook the cases hanging from his waist, and looked up into the sky. “At any rate, keep up the good work, bros. In the two weeks since Musashi’s arrival, we have finally all gathered for an emergency meeting. We will be discussing what to do about Musashi and I am sure Musashi has their own ideas on the matter.”

He gave an exaggerated bow and tapped his right foot. As soon as the metallic noise rang from the sole of his shoe, he vanished. All that remained was one last sentence in his voice.

“Tres España and Musashi are both making plenty of plans.”

A certain white-walled hallway smelled of disinfectant and never turned out its lights.

It was the hallway of a hospital. Walking on its marble floor were two women wearing red uniforms.

One was tall, had long ears, and wore glasses. The other was short and had two false arms.

Both of them carried wicker baskets as they walked through the hallway which was filled with the afternoon sun.

The tall one lowered the ends of her eyebrows and smiled toward the short one.

“Sorry about the trouble, Tachibana Gin. You did not have to help.”

“Please, call me Gin, Lady Juana. I am helping because visiting Muneshige has shown me the meaning in this sort of thing. ...Also, I found this a bit surprising.”

“Surprising?”

“Testament,” replied Gin.

She was a special duty officer, but she had no real connection to the student council. Also, the student council had the political power and right to recommend people or approve people for inherited names, so they had some power over her. It had been Juana who had told her Muneshige was to lose his inherited name. However...

“I was surprised to hear the great Juana, one of the Eight Great Dragon Kings, was handing out flowers and snacks to the sick and to the children.”

“The great Juana...? I...” Juana smiled amid the shadows of the white hallway.

“Well, I can imagine how you think about me and view me. They write the same things in the newspapers and on the divine network.”

“Testament. Do not worry. The divine network contains fan clubs filled with people who love how harsh you are. A recent survey asked people what profession they wanted to see you in. I believe the top three results were female

teacher, female office chief, and female inquisitor. Female class representative was an honorable mention, but was disqualified for the age mismatch.”

“I don’t really understand this. Is female teacher really a unique profession?”

Gin tilted her head as she walked.

“I once asked Muneshige-... Oh, I should explain. As 1st special duty officer, his job includes handling information, so he had investigated this kind of thing. Anyway, I asked him if it was really that hard to distinguish between a profession and a genre. Oh, and according to him, I am a ‘female fiancée’. It seems redundant to me.”

“I still don’t really understand. At any rate, I will keep in mind that I am apparently suited toward being a female teacher. ...Oh, turn right here. We will head outside toward the children’s building.”

Juana used her knee to push open the door leading to the outdoor passageway.

I thought she would have more of an air of importance, thought Gin when she saw that.

The wicker basket Gin held radiated faint heat and the smell of butter. The heavy scent that filled her nose was not often smelled in the Tachibana household that primarily ate Japanese food.

“Is this homemade?”

“Testament,” replied Juana as she walked out underneath the afternoon sun. “The dough has to ferment, so I set it sit out last night before going to sleep.”

“I see. I make my preparations directly after dinner.”

“Oh? Why that early?”

Gin thought it would be best not to answer that, so she changed the subject.

“Do you do this to relieve stress? I think you should sleep at night.”

“No, I enjoy having something to focus on. And I can use a spell for compressed sleep.”

“Testament,” replied Gin as she followed Juana out into the sun.

They were headed for the hospital atop the hill across the plaza. To their left, they could see several domed school buildings surrounded by the walls of Alcalá de Henares. The city at the foot of the mountain spread out beyond that. Juana seemed to be concerned about the eastern end of the city, but that only contained the slums and the hospital for those with low incomes.

“Lady Juana, are we taking these snacks to the other hospital too?”

“Testament. When I made the suggestion, that man insisted I give them out ‘evenly to everyone’. I thought that would be impossible, but bakeries around the city are cooperating. This is the only hospital that gets the ones I baked personally.”

By “that man”, she likely meant Chancellor and Student Council President Segundo. She would often mention him in conversation, but Gin did not recall ever hearing her say his name. Gin mentally tilted her head as she walked along the stone-paved plaza.

“Does the chancellor always say things that get in your way like that?”

“Hm.”

Juana lowered her eyebrows in thought and Gin arrived one step behind her.

“As far as I can see, he leaves everything to you. To be honest...” She felt bad saying this about him, but she wanted to check. “It appears to me he was forced into taking the role of chancellor and president to recreate Tres España’s decline.”

“Gin,” said Juana. Her back was to Gin as she continued to walk. “Watch what you say. He is quite capable. We need to trust him.”

“How can you trust him?” asked Gin. “He leaves almost every job with you and today he has vanished somewhere. Just before noon, you were unsure what to do about a letter addressed to him, correct? You ultimately had the Valdés siblings search for him, but-...”

“Gin,” said Juana once more. “Why do you trust Tachibana Muneshige?”

“Because he gave me a new reason to live,” she immediately replied proudly.

“Then you need not ask for my reason,” said Juana. “It would not help you.”

“Testament,” said Gin with a small nod. “I apologize for asking a question like a sort of test.”

“Don’t apologize. If you asked him that kind of question now, he would likely do nothing but smile weakly.”

“Why does he have no motivation whatsoever?”

“No motivation whatsoever...” muttered Juana with her head lowered a bit.

Gin thought she had said too much, but then Juana spoke without turning around.

“Because he lost his reason to live.”

Gin stopped walking when she heard that. She could tell her eyebrows were bending.

A reason to live. Her reason to live was Muneshige.

What if Chancellor Segundo had something like that, but...

“He lost it?”

When she imagined the same happening to herself, she felt a chill.

“Everyone is looking our way from the children’s hospital.”

Hearing that, Gin looked toward the two white buildings before them. From where they were, they could see the north side of the children's hospital which was the back side. The patient rooms had no windows on this side and they were only visible from the hallways and the cafeteria, but the children had already noticed Juana.

“...!”

Children shouted within the windows and a group ran out of the building. Gin saw the parents notice them and bow.

The children's hospital was made up of two buildings, but...

“The right building is for the long-lived race and the left one is for humans. Be careful, Gin. Some of the children have yet to realize the meaning in that distinction and there is no reason to let them know before they have to.”

Gin tilted her head. There was a place for humans and long-lived, but...

“What about the children of the half-lived race which is a mix of human and long-lived?”

“Given Tres España's insistence on purity, do you really think they have a place in our central hospital? They are so hated because they are indistinguishable from the long-lived,” said Juana with her back turned.

Lady Juana was selected for the student council as a long-lived elite, recalled Gin.

The posture of Juana's back told Gin she had her own thoughts on those born between a human and a long-lived. Gin also knew Juana could not speak those thoughts lightly due to her position as vice president.

...But the chancellor and president says those things quite plainly.

When Juana had suggested giving out snacks, he had insisted on doing so equally. He likely meant equal between humans, long-lived, and even half-lived.

And Juana highly valued him and was doing exactly as he said.

“Testament. I asked something I should have known. My apologies.”

Gin adjusted her grip on her basket and lined up beside Juana. When she looked up from Juana’s left, she saw that Juana was smiling. That smile somehow reminded her of that man.

But Juana’s gaze slowly moved from the hospital to the western sky.

A giant flat cloud could be seen above the ocean that travelled from the Iberian Peninsula to the New World.

“Our Grande y Felicísima Armada is being constructed in there, isn’t it? The old fleet made up of fishing boats and ships from the Battle of Lepanto modified for use in the open sea will eventually be dissolved and either used as transport ships to the New World or sold to civilians. Fusae’s San Lorenzo has been repaired, so all that remains are the readjustments to the flagship San Martín,” said Juana as she stared at the distant cloud. “San Martín was able to approach without England noticing and then attack Musashi. I wonder how England and Musashi will see through to its identity. ...No, they are both still sounding each other out. They have to decide what to do with that crashed transport ship between them.”

As Juana looked into the western sky, she narrowed her eyes and sighed at the slight hint of evening colors in the sun.

“Will night eventually arrive?”

“According to the Testament, Tres España is known as the empire on which the sun never sets.”

“Testament,” answered Juana with a nod, but Gin saw her close her eyes. Juana formed a self-deprecating smile and said, “As the land of non-humans, you could call England the empire of the night. And the Far East is the land of the rising sun. When the people of dawn arrive at the empire of the night, will their rise be able to cause the sun to set?”

“Well...”

“Testament. I know it is a needless worry. The way I see it, it is reckless to try to stop the sun from setting. And the sun looks all the brighter when it rescues you from the night.”

So...

“I think there are those among the people of the sunken dawn who are struggling to rise up from the night. And that struggling dawn confronts the light of our empire by always trying to hold a new light.”

Just as Juana said that, two figures ran up the slope of the hill to their right. Gin and Juana turned around to find a pair from the baseball team.

“Ah. Look, brother! I told you she’d be here! Lady Juana! Lady Juana!”

That energetic voice belonged to...

“...The Valdés siblings?”

“What is it? This is a hospital, you know?”

Gin nodded in agreement with Juana’s question. She wondered what this was about and saw the Valdés sister arrive ahead of her brother. She bowed, stopped running, and looked up into the sky.

“Apparently, the secretary will find the chancellor and bring him back by nightfall! All right! Odd job complete!”

“Sister, I think such a short notification could be handled by divine message.”

“Testament. Thank you very much. Now, 4th special duty officer, what do you have to report that you could not do by divine message?”

“Testament,” replied the Valdés brother when he arrived. He bowed and suddenly said, “England’s Trumps have made a compromise with the Far East’s Musashi.”

“...Eh?”

Gin understood why Juana was confused.

A compromise meant England was showing understanding towards Musashi.

...This could be bad if Musashi and England form an alliance.

The European forces would be unable to form a single side of the Musashi vs. Testament Union conflict.

“Could you be more specific?”

“Testament. This is why I opted to deliver the message in person.” The Valdés brother closed his eyes and lowered his head a bit. “The compromise is to allow supplies to be delivered to the crashed transport ship via a diplomatic ship. Also, the crew of the crashed ship are allowed on the fourth level of England. The crew is not yet allowed to return to Musashi, but it seems England wishes to have a trade meeting and a diplomatic meeting with Musashi.”

Gin saw Juana’s face grow truly expressionless upon hearing that.

...If England holds a diplomatic meeting with Musashi...

“England’s relationship with Musashi will be made clear very soon.”

“Testament,” said Juana before continuing for Gin. “And the armada battle will be soon as well. England must want to make a decision concerning Musashi before their battle with us. But what does Musashi intend to do? Can you gather information on their situation through our intelligence networks?”

The siblings exchanged a hesitant glance.

“Well... Brother? How about you say it?”

“Sister, this is the first time I have been jealous of your standing as younger sibling. How would you like tripping down a flight of stairs together and having our minds switch bodies?”

Is that based on “Torikaebaya Monogatari: The Emperor is Dokyo and Dokyo is the Emperor”, that Kamakura period sequel to a famous piece of transsexual literature? thought Gin.

“Anyway,” said the Valdés brother while scratching at his head. “It seems Musashi and the group on the transport ship are having some kind of festival.”

“A festival?”

“Testament. From what I heard, it isn’t even night yet and Musashi is already firing fireworks horizontally between the ships to ‘see which one is the strongest’ and a member of a visual band dived into the audience but ended up in the hospital because no one caught him.”

“What is that country thinking? ...And what about the transport ship?”

“Testament. It seems a female student with some kind of spear is an expert at high-speed fishing. With her as their leader, they are holding a festival in which they use up all of their food reserves. It seems they are worshiping both the spear and the girl with cries of ‘Leader! Leader!’. They also started a fire, but it began to spread and caused panic.”

Gin nodded because she could easily imagine the scene. The other three looked at her speechlessly.

“As the ones who attacked them, we are definitely on the side of order and justice.”

Chapter 12: Those who Wait in a Place of Yearning

CHAPTER 12

"Those who Wait in a Place of Yearning"



How wide
Has the night opened up?
Point Allocation (Direction)

How wide

Has the night opened up?

Point Allocation (Direction)

The sky was filled with the colors of the night and two lights could be seen in that night sky.

One was the giant floating island of England and the other was the eight ships of Musashi floating to the south of England.

The floating island and ships would occasionally produce clouds. From the direction of the wind, clouds would gather around England and scatter and clouds would form around and trail from the corners and points of Musashi's frame.

England was motionless, but Musashi would sometimes move. The clouds would scatter along with the waves of the ships' waterlines whenever the ships gently changed their orientation or position. By adjusting their position in relation to the wind, the ships tried to cause as little disturbance to the air currents as they could.

And occasionally other ships would appear in the sky to the southeast.

They were Dutch transport ships.

Sometimes it was just one and sometimes there were multiple, but they would all travel to England and then return.

Musashi's ships would alter their movements as if watching the flow of ships coming and going. As Musashi took time to change its direction, scars were still visible on it. The port side was ripped up as if a long lid had been removed.

However, the wind struck them and produced noise with no regard for the damage.

This produced a whistle-like noise that was sometimes low-pitched and sometimes high-pitched. It was of course audible from Musashi, but England could hear it too.

England was surrounded by a shallow sea on the fourth level.

A long structure was stabbed into the southwestern side of that sea.

It was a ship.

The transport ship bore the crest of Musashi Ariadust. Water spray rose from the stern of the ship that pointed toward the sky and about a third of the ship was sticking down into the shallow sea.

The ship was sitting in a location that had originally been on the shore, but the ship's weight had caused the surrounding area to collapse down like a mortar, forming a shallow inlet.

The moonlight illuminated a figure on the ship which was standing up vertically. The ship's gravitational control allowed this figure to sit perpendicular to the wall-like deck, so they were parallel to the water's surface.

“Mitotsudaira, I will take over now.”

Hearing that voice, the silver-haired girl named Mitotsudaira turned her golden eyes toward the speaker.

“Oh, Masazumi? Isn't Futayo next? ...And my shift is not over yet.”

As Mitotsudaira turned around with a blanket draped over her shoulders, she saw Masazumi without her coat or the sleeves to her inner shirt.

Masazumi approached Mitotsudaira who sat on a barrel.

“Futayo will apparently be protecting Horizon. She said she can't let her guard down on the final night.”

“Judge. That is very like her. So how is Horizon?”

“Judge,” said Masazumi with a nod and a glance toward the hatch she had come from. “We don’t really know why, but she’s sleeping again. I don’t know if it’s because she lost consciousness from Akedia Katathlipse’s restraints, but she’s been sleeping for almost twenty hours a day. She doesn’t know the exact reason herself, but she said her OS is optimizing itself for handling that unfamiliar attack.”

“Having an automaton body must be tough.” Mitotsudaira smiled in the moonlight. “Anyway, the chancellor and the others will be arriving tomorrow, won’t they? I doubt the chancellor will be able to leave Horizon alone.”

“No, he won’t. There’s definitely going to be some kind of commotion.”

“Yes.”

The two girls lowered their heads, but Masazumi recovered first. She sighed and shrugged.

“At any rate, today makes two weeks. We deciphered the earlier whistle message from Musashi and it seems things have been officially decided with England. The diplomatic ship arriving tomorrow will provide personnel and materials to aid us as planned, so this is our last night living like this. You can go back to your room and sleep. It’s been a while since you got to sleep before ten, right?”

“Judge,” said Mitotsudaira with a gentle sigh.

Just like Masazumi, she had removed her coat and the sleeves of her inner suit, but she had also removed her side skirt. However, she hid herself with the blanket draped over her. She smiled with a hint of bitterness.

“After two weeks, this unexpected adventure is at its end.”

“Judge,” muttered Masazumi with a sigh of her own. “We’re stuck here and England cut off our divine transmissions, so we’ve barely been able to contact Musashi.”

As they were in England’s territory, England had set up protection against the divine transmissions that travelled via ley lines. If they tried to force a transmission through, England would intercept it. That could be used against them in negotiations later, so they had communicated by light and sound instead. England would naturally have realized they were communicating through the lights and Musashi’s steam whistle, but they had not told them to stop or even asked about it.

“England must not want to completely oppose us.”

“Judge. But as someone originally from Hexagone Française, this situation is a bit humiliating. I would prefer if they came at me as an enemy.”

“Is there anyone still alive in Hexagone Française who was around during the time of the Norman Conquest or the Hundred Years’ War?”

“Judge,” answered Mitotsudaira. “With the exception of some special clans, we werewolves have the same lifespan as humans. During the Norman Conquest, most of Europe’s non-human races moved to England, but those were mostly the serfs.” Mitotsudaira stopped speaking for a moment, but finally continued. “Most of the nobles and knights remained in their homeland, so during the Hundred Years’ War between England and Hexagone Française, former countrymen were forced to fight one another. Our ancestors fought on the vanguard, but we did so with pride. And eventually, a young female French knight was sent to the warfront to fulfill the history recreation. From what I have heard, it was her death that saved us.”

“So Joan of Arc was included in the history recreation?”

“Judge. And do you know what happened not long after she was burned at the stake to fulfill the recreation?”

Masazumi thought for a moment before answering.

“The Harmonic Unification War?”

“Judge,” answered Mitotsudaira from beyond her long bangs. “It may have been convenient for England and Hexagone Française that the Hundred Years’ War ended so abruptly. There were political problems and both countries wanted a way to settle the vaguer areas of the history recreation such that their country did not decline. They ended up keeping their mouths shut using the Harmonic Unification War as an excuse and then never opened their mouths again until their lifespans reached their end. It is often said there is no more to history than what is recorded. What we learn about in classes is oftentimes not what actually happened in the history recreation. It is merely what was recorded as the ‘proper history’. Most of what actually happened in the Hundred Years’ War was never recorded.”

“I see,” said Masazumi.

As a member of a non-human race, Mitotsudaira could easily be distanced from the others due to her abilities and the legends surrounding her race. She would occasionally give self-deprecating comments implying something had happened in the past, but she had gained something by experiencing that past.

...Well, I’m not about to compare her past to mine. And that’s why I should stop asking questions.

Mitotsudaira would eventually talk about it if she wanted to or the others would learn about it some other way. And once that happened, she might be on an even footing with her classmates who had also experienced her past.

...But do you really want to be on even footing with an idiot like Aoi?

“...What is it? Why are you lowering your head like that?”

“Oh, it’s nothing.”

Why are you worrying her? thought Masazumi with a bitter smile.

Mitotsudaira had never spoken about anything like this before. It was likely due to the time, the place, and the fact that they were alone. In that case...

“I don’t think this two week adventure has been all that bad.”

“It is not over yet. We have not received permission to leave.”

“But with more people here, things will be livelier. And we’ll have supplies: food, clothes, and beauty products to return your damaged hair to normal, Mitotsudaira.”

“Who was thoughtful enough to send that?”

“The Aoi sister would be a decent bet, but Asama can be pretty understanding.”

Mitotsudaira’s expression changed. Her eyes opened in surprise, but they soon bent in a smile.

“You know more about the others than I do. And you can speak positively about them like the chancellor.”

“Please don’t compare me to him.”

Seeing Mitotsudaira’s slight smile brought a smile to her own face.

For the past two weeks, they had been forced to live within the transport ship. The position of knight and 5th special duty officer had been a heavy burden during that time. However...

“You can finally relax, Mitotsudaira.”

“But we cannot return to Musashi just yet. It is a lot of trouble, but we have no choice.”

She smiled, but their requirement to stay on the transport ship weighed most heavily on her.

...This is a lot different from her life as a knight.

The ship was oriented vertically and it was not equipped with living spaces. It acted as a place to escape the rain and wind, but it was lacking all the other necessities of life.

Even those like Masazumi who was not picky about clothes or food and those who lived in small underground rooms on Musashi had found it oppressive. But there had been one saving grace.

“You two, I will take over now. The ship will arrive tomorrow, so you girls get some sleep.”

Tenzou.

Masazumi turned toward the approaching boy who wore his uniform like a ninja outfit.

...The scary part is how even that ninja's clothes look the same as when we arrived.

She had heard that he had underwent survival training since before he entered elementary school and that his ninja relatives had taught him a lot, but watching him for the past two weeks had left her convinced it was true.

And so she nodded toward him.

“Having you with us has been a huge help.”

Tenzou stopped five meters away and lowered down in a preparation to flee at any second.

“Y-you're plotting something, aren't you? You are, aren't you!?”

“...What have Aoi and the others been doing to you? Are you okay?”

“And if we were plotting something, why would we tell you?”

“I suppose that’s true. ... Wait. Why aren’t you denying it?”

“Just calm down,” said Masazumi while waiving her hands.

...But it really is thanks to him that we’ve lasted this long.

After all, most of them had never before been enclosed in a small area with so much lacking.

But he had undergone survival training and he held the position of 1st special duty officer. He had acted on his own, exchanged ideas with those from the naval clubs, and prioritized securing and distributing water.

And once they had water, he had given the boys a large area to live in and had given the girls individual smaller areas.

Thinking back, that allotment was unfair to the boys.

...But he gave it some thought.

When the boys had found something they did not like, they had taken pieces from the broken areas and remodeled their single area into a large boys’ room.

Meanwhile, the girls had been able to remodel their small areas as they saw fit. The small size left little work for the remodeling and they functioned as individual rooms that protected their privacy.

The boys had primarily handled fishing, managing the ship, fixing the ship to the crust so it would not fall, and gathering the water that welled up from the bedrock. The girls had primarily handled cooking, laundry, and communications.

The officers and student council members had carried out their own duties. Futayo and Mitotsudaira had acted as emergency lookouts, smashed or carried heavy objects, and been the lead fishers. Masazumi had contacted Musashi and acted as judge when trouble arose. The three of them had been given a few other special jobs, but one stuck out in particular.

“I never thought we would continue classes and training here.”

Masazumi saw Tenzou scratch at his head and smile bitterly.

“Well, when we don’t know what’s going on outside, studying the different counties is all the more important. Having a meaningful way of killing time is useful when you’re suddenly thrown out into the middle of nowhere.”

“Judge. I never thought our teacher’s way of lecturing would come in handy here. It’s not much different from having someone else teach the class.”

“Judge,” said Masazumi with a nod.

By learning about the political situation in England, they could learn how they would be treated and what kind of country they were currently in.

Mitotsudaira was a French knight, so she knew England’s past history and relationships with other countries from the wary viewpoint of Hexagone Française.

Futayo had given lectures and hands-on training in combat and how to move as a solid unit, but she sometimes needed an interpreter because she was too skilled herself and could be a bit clueless. Having a way of “confirming one’s strength” was important in an uncertain situation like this.

There was also Tonbokiri. It had been modified with parts from the ship and springs had been used to automate its extension and contraction mechanism. That had allowed Futayo to easily catch fish with it.

...She can use its cutting power to split the ocean and catch the fish within.

Because of this, people had started referring to the spear as “the great dragonfly” and “the dragonfly god”. Recently, the boys would fall to their knees and bow down three times when Futayo appeared with it. That was apparently a jinx to bring about an excellent catch.

“But this camp life should improve starting tomorrow.”

“Yes. That fire from earlier was a disaster, though,” muttered Mitotsudaira with a sigh.

“We really are inexperienced,” said Masazumi with a bitter smile.

“Is that for what I said before? But you are right. A knight is meant for castles and the battlefield.” Mitotsudaira turned to Tenzou. “I am thankful you transferred me to the night watch. The moonlight revitalizes me and I would get sunburnt during the day. ...I do not know if Futayo is fine with that, though.”

“With Tonbokiri, she has somehow become the leader of the boys,” said Masazumi. “They’ve started placing sun-dried objects and shell necklaces in front of her room as offerings. The other day, they were making offerings with a giant stone currency they made at some point, but I made them throw those away.”

“They have turned into an uncivilized tribe, haven’t they? But that should improve tomorrow. I want to take a bath that isn’t in boiling water and sleep in a bed I can actually stretch out in.”

“Then do not worry,” cut in Tenzou. “I asked Shirojiro-dono for those materials last time. The girls really do have it hardest at times like this.”

Masazumi and Mitotsudaira exchanged a glance and they both nodded.

“Why has such a considerate guy never had a girlfriend?”

Masazumi’s question led to the two girls exchanging a longer glance.

The moon was out, but the night was still quite dark as they spoke.

“It’s probably that ninja outfit. A guy who wears that at all times would be out of the question.”

“Judge. I see. The flaw was so large I didn’t notice it at first.”

“S-stop! Don’t discuss this like I’m not even here!” Tenzou folded his arms.
“Also, I have already decided my girlfriend will be blonde and well-endowed.”

“Is that so?” Masazumi exchanged another glance through the darkness with Mitotsudaira. “Hey, Mitotsudaira. Why do guys set up needlessly high hurdles for themselves?”

“Judge. It may be that when they do that, they can delude themselves into thinking their failure is due to no one meeting their standards rather than due to their own unpopularity.”

“I see. What’s the point of having pride like that? I don’t understand it at all, but should I feel sorry for him?”

“Nwohhh! You girls don’t show any mercy, do you!?”

“Calm down.” Masazumi held up a hand to stop Tenzou and then smiled. “How about you join us in our eventual meeting with England? Fairy Queen Elizabeth should clear your hurdle.”

“I can tell the difference between a hurdle and a gantry crane,” commented Tenzou.

Mitotsudaira smiled at that.

“Well, you did help us out a lot. Is it tough fulfilling your role as 1st special duty officer?”

“No. I always carry the ninja tools I need for training.”

“Ninja tools?” Mitotsudaira tilted her head. “Do ninja even use actual tools to train? For example, I thought you trained your jumping strength by jumping over a growing stalk of cannabis.”

Mitotsudaira was correct. As a child, Masazumi had read Masked Ninja: Russian Akakage. In that story, the ninja had cultivated fast-growing cannabis and jumped over it every morning to naturally train his jumping strength. That alone could not

possibly be enough to train, but a group of freaks who hid their faces for their entire lives likely had a secret method.

Tenzou nodded in agreement.

“That training method was used up until my father’s generation.”

“Really?”

At the prospect of learning a ninja secret, the two girls leaned forward with intense curiosity. Tenzou nodded again and explained.

“My father’s generation grew a large amount of cannabis in the ship’s planter because they thought they could use some if it for their own personal training. But they accidentally brought it back to their rooms, accidentally grew a whole lot more, accidentally rolled it, and accidentally smoked it. They naturally ended up in the magistrate’s office and-...”

“I get the feeling I’m about to hear something that will get me in trouble, so stop there. And for future reference, did adding ‘accidentally’ to everything hold up in court?”

“No, no.”

Tenzou shook his hands, so Masazumi decided to pretend she had never heard any of it.

“Oh?”

Mitotsudaira suddenly looked to the east. She looked toward the top of a cliff illuminated by the moonlight.

“Is that...?”

A cloaked and hooded figure stood atop the cliff that had once been a hill.

This was the figure the villagers referred to as Scarred.

Mitotsudaira moved her nose slightly as she looked at the figure a few dozen meters away.

“That person occasionally shows up and watches us.”

From what she had heard...

“That is that Scarred person you protected when the ship crashed, isn’t it?”

“I wouldn’t go so far as to say protected...”

Mitotsudaira did not understand why he was arguing. However...

“He tried to save those children, but that means he might be a local leader or someone with power on that level. He made sure those children made it home, right?”

“Judge. I saw the spirits secure the boat you put the children on.”

It had been Mitotsudaira and Futayo who had saved the three children from the crashing ship.

...It was nothing too amazing.

Just before the ship had crashed, they had thought up a few different methods of rescuing the children.

The most effective idea was having Mitotsudaira jump between the ship and the ground and saving the children with her silver chains or having someone quick on their feet like Tenzou doing the same minus the chains.

But they had no way of seeing what lay ahead of the ship’s bow and they could not place a lookout there when they knew it was about to smash into the ground. If they charged underneath the falling ship without confirming the children’s locations first, it would lead to disaster. Also, they needed time to run out from

under the ship's wide bow and they had no way of knowing how the children would react while panicked.

...Charging in and saving them would have been risky.

As a knight, she felt it would have been possible, but they had wanted an absolute guarantee. After all, killing British residents would hurt the Far East's diplomatic standpoint.

That had left only one option. Masazumi shrugged and muttered that option aloud.

"I never thought you would make your way through the bow."

Their method of saving the children had been to destroy the ship's bow before the crash.

They had broken through it and taken the children in through that hole.

...And to do that...

Mitotsudaira thought back.

They had used a single method.

Futayo had used Tonbokiri to repeatedly cut the edge of the front wall of the bow like a barrel's lid. She had then cut once down the center and Mitotsudaira had used her silver chains to open the surface from within like a pair of double doors.

They had known Tonbokiri could cut through a ship's inner shell due to its attack on Regno Unito during the Battle of Mikawa, but Mitotsudaira felt Futayo's actions here had gone well beyond that.

...The transport ship is made up of several frames.

Futayo had run down the inside of the vertical ship as if it were rising.

She had used the frame as footing to accelerate down faster than gravitational acceleration and she had cut the very frames she was using for footing.

By the time Mitotsudaira had taken even a few steps inside the ship, fragments of the metal pillars had been flying through the air like fallen leaves.

By the time she had swept those fragments aside to create a path, Futayo was already charging toward the bow.

And Futayo had turned toward her and said, “Well done.”

With that one comment, she had cut open the front wall.

...She took action without giving a single thought to what I would do.

Mitotsudaira had just barely made it in time, but she did not know if Futayo had simply been ignoring her, had trusted her to make it in time, or had been trying to rush her.

As a result, the opened front wall had swallowed up the children like a snake striking its prey.

“I am glad we could save them.”

The children had simply been sitting on the ground.

Mitotsudaira and Futayo had landed next to them, protected them from the rubble and the pieces of the ship that was destroying the surrounding area and itself, and cut apart any piece of the ship that were breaking in an unfortunate way.

A massive number of parts had flown and danced through the air, but spiraling silver chains had formed a protective wall and Futayo’s high speed attacks had beat down anything that threatened to make it through.

In the end, the impact and weight of the crashing ship had caused the crust to sink down and water had flowed in from the ocean, so the two girls had scooped up the children and climbed up the ship which was standing on end.

Mitotsudaira felt they had done well, but after appearing on the deck, bathing in the applause, and retreating into hiding, they had both collapsed to the floor.

The silver chains and Tonbokiri had also done well. But...

“ ... ”

It was not noticeable now because she was wearing gloves, but Mitotsudaira had fingernails broken on both hands.

On her right, it was her middle and ring fingers. On her left, it was her middle and index fingers. Because her left hand was not her dominant hand, she had put too much strength into the index finger.

As a member of a Loup-Garou family line, she healed quickly. That was one ability of the race, but high-speed healing of nails had a way of leaving them looking bad. That left natural healing at human speed as her best option.

...I could always get a manicure, but...

A manicure let heat remain in the tips of the nails and the discomfort could confuse her actions.

“Well, we saved the children. That is enough.”

“This isolated state is a real problem. We can’t contact the village through Musashi and the residents of the fourth level won’t approach us,” said Masazumi. “But that guy in the cloak seemed really surprised to see you on the deck with the children.”

“Judge.”

Mitotsudaira looked up toward the cliff.

The figure in the cloak happened to look over toward them at the same moment. The hooded silhouette was clearly visible in the moonlight.

The figure clearly looked at Mitotsudaira and nodded.

...He is probably British...

But Mitotsudaira still courteously nodded in return.

The figure turned to Masazumi and bowed again. Lastly, the figure looked toward Tenzou.

“ ... ”

They quickly nodded and immediately turned around.

And the figure left.

...Eh?

Masazumi expressed Mitotsudaira's question.

“Crossunite, did you do something to make that guy hate you?”

If someone else thought it looked the same, Mitotsudaira decided her concern was legitimate.

“Does he resent you for interfering while we rescued the children? Although, I doubt someone would charge in there if they simply wanted the fame.”

“I don't think I did anything,” muttered Tenzou with a sigh. “I had a good reason for rushing in and covering for them and I thought the reason was obvious after living on Musashi for so long, but it may not have been as obvious to them.”

“What? ... What was obvious?”

Mitotsudaira did not understand what he meant, but she got the gist of the issue.

“Do you mean that person made some kind of misunderstanding about your actions?”

“Judge. My actions seemed incredibly natural to me, but...” Tenzou then brought a hand to his head. “No, I should not be arguing my case here. It would be best for both of us if I simply say I went too far.”

“What?”

Mitotsudaira and Masazumi both tilted their heads.

“Why wouldn’t you clear up a misunderstanding that paints you in a worse light?”

“Well... Because it allows this person to avoid any shame. That is my duty as a ninja.” Tenzou held his hand palm up toward the two girls. “I will take over now. I am in charge of communicating with Musashi tonight.”

“Judge.”

Mitotsudaira nodded and stood up off of the barrel she had been sitting on. She was reluctant to miss out on hearing what Musashi had to say, but she would see them tomorrow. She felt a small pain in the fingernails placed on the edge of the barrel and she and Masazumi passed by Tenzou.

Tenzou nodded, so she responded in kind and suddenly looked toward the moonlit hill.

Recalling the cloaked figure from earlier, Mitotsudaira began to think.

...The 1st special duty officer said he was fine with the misunderstanding as long as it benefited the other party, but what would my king have to say about that depressing way of thinking?

“Hey!”

Suddenly, a familiar voice called out from the sea to the south.

“Ch-chancellor!?”

That cry of confusion was accompanied by lights appearing in the fourth level village and the higher levels of England to the north. However, the idiot's voice showed no concern.

“Can you hear me, Horizon!? Tonight Musashi Ariadust's broadcasting station will be holding an...international intercourse? Is that what you'd call it?”

“Heh heh heh. That is my foolish brother for you. ...But the correct term would be ‘diplomatic meeting’.”

“Oh, wow! I've got a genius for a sister! But I like international intercourse! It sounds erotic! Let's have i-intercourse! Intercourse! And let's cross some forbidden borders to make it international! ...Wait, Asama! Why are you holding your bow and arrow up at such close range? And why are you smiling?”

After the sound of an arrow firing, the broadcast filled with static.

Mitotsudaira was disturbed by how perfectly she could picture the scene in her head, but she quickly realized Masazumi and Tenzou had the exact same expression on their faces. That realization led her to speak in a voice filled with a relieved bitterness she had not used in two weeks.

“They have Neshinbara who was cursed and is being blamed for the attack and the damage to Musashi, but I see nothing has changed.”

“Why do none of them ever change?” muttered a voice on the opposite side of Musashi from the transport ship.

Specifically, this was on the edge of the academy supply port on the rear of Okutama.

The academy supply port was used to moor the ships bringing supplies for the academy or to be used by the clubs. It was a flat landing spot measuring over 100 meters square. It was located on the lower rear portion of the three anti-wind

walls surrounding Musashi Ariadust Academy on either side and the back. It was truly the rearmost portion of Okutama.

The outer edge of the supply port contained a passageway with a railing and club rooms for the ship and transport-related clubs. It was nighttime and Musashi was not currently participating in trade, so only the standby lights were on. As the area was behind the school, one could only see the sky, the walls, and the light from the windows on the walls.

But someone stood on the edge of that port. A few sign frames were opened around Neshinbara. He rested his right elbow on the railing, rotated his body, and leaned back on the railing.

He leaned the cane in his right hand against the railing next to him and looked at his left leg. From the shin down, the leg was covered in bandages and a splint.

“Honestly. People are even saying I’m using this to exaggerate my injury for sympathy.” He saw the Mouse on his shoulder open a new sign frame. “Ahh. Did someone start a new thread on the academy’s divine network? This one’s an inspection, hm? ...People are saying all sorts of things on the journal sites and the student council’s site is getting an amazing number of divine messages. ...And every single one of them is saying what I should have done differently.”

He sighed. His gaze was turned toward the sign frame that displayed a diagram of Musashi. The damage to the ships was displayed with lines and colors.

“And...”

He turned to the sign frame displaying those injured in the previous battle and the one displaying the financial losses to buildings and such.

After checking on all that information, Neshinbara muttered to himself in the darkness.

“This is tough. I thought I was prepared, but it’s different once everyone is doubting you and denying your actions.”

...I think I did as good as could be hoped...

“But everyone is saying that my efforts were inadequate or worthless and that there was a better way.” He sighed. “They’re saying it would have been better had I not been there.”

As he sighed again, he heard a sudden voice.

“Oh? I noticed you haven’t been coming to class and you didn’t show up at the festival, but is this where you’ve been?”

Neshinbara turned around toward the voice coming from up in the sky.

Even in the darkness, he could see someone with black wings.

“Naruze-kun.”

“Judge. I hope you can remember at least that much, you shut-in.” She landed atop the railing next to him. “How about these two losers take some time to complain to each other?”

Chapter 13: Conversations between Worriers

CHAPTER 13

"Conversations between Worriers"



What do you call something
That unlike a spark
Is small yet does not disappear?
Point Allocation (Non-Interference)

What do you call something

That unlike a spark

Is small yet does not disappear?

Point Allocation (Non-Interference)

“Complain, hm?”

Naruze’s suggestion to “complain to each other” was met with both annoyance and resignation from Neshinbara.

He would have preferred attaching reasons to his thoughts rather than doing something as unproductive as complaining.

...But I am worrying.

The reason for this was simple.

“Well, I suppose I am being exposed to enough criticism to want to complain.”

“Yes. I tried searching your name on the ship’s divine network and what I found made me feel bad. Seeing a classmate shamed like that is not fun. I decided to show my support.”

“Eh? You’re on my side?”

“No. I joined them in criticizing you and agreed with them as much as I could, but it seems I was on an entirely different level from them because they all backed off. They left just when I started a new thread. It’s sad they can’t do any better than that.”

“A-are you trying to complain or insult me?”

“Never mind that,” said Naruze.

The corner of her mouth rose in a half-bitter and half-scornful smile and she spread her wings toward the night wind to keep her balance.

“Checking everyone’s opinions gave me a general understanding of the situation. The damage from the attack and the shelling left Musashi damaged.”

But...

“It may not have been this bad before, but this is hardly the first time we have been damaged. When you took command as strategist during the Battle of Mikawa, some of those who fought in the battle were injured and Musashi was badly damaged. We were injured too. But there was one obvious difference in this battle.”

Neshinbara gave the answer before Naruze could.

“We didn’t win. Right?”

It’s when you win that the injuries and the losses gain meaning, thought Neshinbara.

“It’s all meaningless if you don’t win.”

They had excuses and explanations for the outcome, but that would not quell people’s emotions.

Checking the records of other countries showed people forcing the blame onto each other whenever they lost. The blame for a loss or failure had to go somewhere.

“By pushing the blame on someone else, people can accept the loss because it ‘wasn’t their fault’.”

“Musashi has an upper age limit on students, so even if the children try to support you, their parents will not forgive you. When their children come back injured,

they feel like saying ‘I told you so’. Plus, they will not want to blame their own children, so they will point the blame in your direction.”

“I’m really glad you understand.”

I’m not very tough if I feel like that helps, thought Neshinbara.

“I have to use the divine network in my duties as secretary and I need to obtain all sorts of information to fulfill my role as strategist, but that means I have to see what people are saying about us.”

“Even in the historical records, defeated generals are said to have received horrible criticism. This may be part of that curse.”

“Judge.”

Neshinbara sighed and leaned up against the railing. On top of the railing, Naruze took a step away to the right and used her wings to balance herself again.

“In the Three Kingdoms Period of China, military commanders were often said to ‘die in agony’ or ‘die in a fit of rage’, but that was likely due to the stress their position put on them. Dying in agony likely referred to a heart attack and in a fit of rage was likely stress related, but I hear it was difficult to reproduce that in the history recreation.”

“I know asking this to a history nerd will bring us off topic, but what did they do?”

“Judge. The direct resolution was to give them enough stress to kill someone before letting them retire as an interpretation of the historical figure’s death.”

“For example?”

“Well, they would trick them onto a hidden camera show where Diaochan would invite them over, but when they jumped into the bed, they found Lu Bu instead. Lu Bu would then announce ‘Welcome, welcome! And surprise!’ ”

Dong Zhuo and most of the early commanders ‘died in agony’ like that. But once Lu Bu retired, people grew suspicious of hidden camera shows. And when China split into the three kingdoms, Zhang Fei tried to fill Lu Bu’s role, but that was not enough to “kill” the Shu commanders. Later, when Guan Yu went to Wei, they began to use games of strip mahjong that were divine broadcasted live to “kill” the commanders who refused to give up. However, that method was banned after Xun You copied it, discarded Cao Cao’s winning tile, lost all of his points, and died in a fit of rage.

Gambling should be avoided, thought Neshinbara.

Afterwards, a national Death Recommendation Committee had been created.

“They would pay off the author of the five-line poem series the commander read to give it a bad ending where the heroine died or their favorite play would be forced into a depressing end where everyone died. There were some incidents where the enraged commander strangled the author or organizer, but for the most part, the ‘agonizing deaths’ of the commanders of the Three Kingdoms Period were recreated like that.”

Neshinbara nodded a few times and suddenly realized something about himself.

“I guess I can still keep going if I haven’t reached that state yet.”

“Musashi would be in trouble if you died, so don’t push yourself too hard.”

Neshinbara’s Mouse informed him that another thread about him had been created on the academy’s divine network. He checked the title.

“That’s what I thought. ...I used to do the same thing with strategists and other occupations.”

“What same thing?”

Neshinbara took a breath and opened his mouth. He spoke the opinion that was most commonly being sent his way.

“I would say they should have done it my way. Everyone says that kind of thing.”

“Yes, but they are free to do so. When I sell my books, a lot of people look through it, say something similar to that, and leave without buying it.”

“And how does that make you feel?”

“I could kick their ass if I wanted to, so it doesn’t really matter. ...What’s with that look?”

Technohexen are scary, thought Neshinbara. But then he had a further thought. *No, most of our class is like that.*

Was it just a bad environment?

But, he thought. *I hope I can vindicate myself.*

If he could still hope for that, he still had a chance. He was still hoping for his own continuation.

...I need to do my best.

He vowed to win next time. Winning gave it all meaning.

From that point of view, the festival after the Battle of Mikawa had been important. That festival had let them all feel first hand that they had won.

“I need to do my best to make sure my achievements warrant a festival.”

“You should have gone to today’s festival. Why didn’t you?”

Neshinbara’s answer was simple: he raised his right arm.

The moonlight illuminated the bandages wrapped around the lower arm where the curse was written. Words were written on the white cloth of the bandages, but they were not fully suppressing what lay beneath.

Strings of glowing text leaked out from below the bandages.

“Macbeth. Shakespeare’s spell continues to curse me. Macbeth is a usurper who kills the king, so the curse means I will harm Aoi-kun.”

In other words...

“Shakespeare cursed me and I have no choice but to take a path apart from the king.”

Naruze’s eyes widened as she looked down at him. She took in a deep breath and spoke.

“I’m using that!!”

...This will work great!

Naruze was sure of it.

“If I have you use that line while naked at a decisive point, it’ll be perfect for convincing the female readers! I could draw up a storyboard around just that one line! Your leg was injured, so how about I set the story in a hospital!?”

“Don’t ask me. That kind of thing has never really interested me.”

Naruze shrugged, shook her head, and took a breath.

“Heh heh. Well, you own the rights to your likeness, so how about I pay you a royalty of 10%?”

“Wouldn’t that 10% be for my human rights, not for using my likeness?”

As long as he let her use him in her doujinshi, she did not care either way.

“Anyway,” muttered Naruze. “You can’t go along with the rest of us with that cursed arm, so why don’t you ask Asama to-...”

She was going to ask why he had not had it purified, but the spell bandages on the arm were proof he had already consulted Asama. The fact that the curse still remained could only mean one thing.

“Is that a kind of curse that can’t be purified away? Does she have to shoot it off?”

“Yes to the first question, no comment to the second. Macbeth will not disappear until the play is over. Macbeth kills the king, but that is the proper course of the play. There is nothing impure about it. Trying to purify it drives it away temporarily, but it does not eliminate it. It seems plays are difficult to purify in Shinto because they are used as offerings to the gods. Asama-kun said the only two options are for Shakespeare to end the play or for it to leave England. It may be possible for me to get remove the part from me, but then the curse will move on to someone else as an understudy.”

“Does it really matter if you let it transfer to someone who doesn’t have to work as secretary?”

“And what if that person is manipulated into killing Aoi-kun?”

That was indeed a bit of a problem.

...He always imagines the worst case scenario which makes him hard to deal with. But that might just be how strategists think.

Neshinbara used his cane to adjust his position.

“It’s easier if I keep the curse because I can try to handle any situation that arises. But that also means I can’t stay by the king’s side or do my job. My right hand is trying to kill the king, so even when I try to write, it tries to indirectly bring the king to his ruin or otherwise cause a scandal while I’m not paying attention.”

“That’s quite a mischievous right hand.”

Naruze’s thoughts then turned to the enemy he had faced.

“What was that about 13 and the 13th Mutsugoirei Academy that Shakespeare mentioned? Do you mind if I ask?”

“Are you going to use it in a doujinshi?”

“Of course. It would weird if I didn’t,” she replied immediately.

Neshinbara brought a hand to his forehead for a moment.

“W-well, I suppose it’s better than having a rumor spread based on something you completely made up. But to be honest, there isn’t much information left about the place.”

“Really?”

Neshinbara gave a small nod.

“Even those of us inside the academy had little knowledge of its place in the outside world, so we just knew of it as an overall unpleasant place. I did some investigating afterwards and it seems it was an orphanage built by Tres España’s previous chancellor, Carlos I. It was meant to begin accelerated education for gifted children at a young age. Facilities like that are everywhere these days, but this one was a bit different.”

Naruze listened carefully.

“This facility was intended to create people with inherited names.”

“Create people...with inherited names?” repeated Naruze.

“Yes,” lightly replied Neshinbara with a shrug. “Carlos I was both Tres España’s chancellor and the Holy Roman emperor-chancellor, but he was more a resident of M.H.R.R. than of Tres España. This meant Tres España was often missing its chancellor. To make up for that, they opted to gain plenty of inherited names for people’s own personal power or to strengthen the country as a whole. However, nobles and rich merchants wanted their descendants to earn an inherited name

and they needed a way to immediately fill the gap if a bearer of an inherited name was lost in an accident.”

“So they created that orphanage?”

“Judge,” answered Neshinbara without looking toward her. He stared straight forward into the air. “It seems an academy originally built for some other purpose was remade. The rumor is that its original purpose was to create students for the Testament Cross-Borders Unit.”

“Was that last part a joke?”

“I’m not sure.” Neshinbara tilted his head. “But all of it came to an end during my generation. After all, one of us almost died.”

“ ... ”

“She was talented. More than me. When she put words together... well, you know how people’s sense for words doesn’t change as they get older, right? Their sense tells them what words to choose from their vocabulary, so a greater vocabulary gives them more words to choose from. Still, their sense for what words to choose doesn’t get any better. Even now, I can tell she was talented. But she was weak to pressure.”

“Wait.” Naruze lightly kicked Neshinbara’s back. “If you don’t want to say this, you don’t have to.”

“If you don’t want to hear it, you don’t have to listen.”

He annoys me sometimes, thought Naruze and that thought seemed to have reached Neshinbara.

“How about I skip ahead?”

“I can’t use this in a doujinshi anyway.”

“Thanks. I would prefer that. ... Anyway, a lot happened and someone was being sent in to inspect the academy. The night before, we were sent out to be

‘transferred’ somewhere else. We decided to run away, so we jumped out of the mobile carriage and walked for four days while praying to the crosses standing along the mountain path. We made our way to the border with Hexagone Française and we decided to go our separate ways to whatever land we wanted. We promised to pretend not to know each other if we saw each other again.”

And yet...

“I wonder why she broke that promise.”

“So this was like a terrible face-to-face class reunion? ...Hm. It had to do with a girl with a major inherited name, so I thought the story would be a little more risqué.”

“Naruze-kun, have you always been so good at giving such straightforward comments? Anyway, I hear that academy was shut down. Tres España’s secretary, Velázquez, is in charge of their orphanages and hospitals, so it fully shifted over to being an orphanage once Felipe Segundo took over.”

“I see.” Naruze nodded. “You went through a lot, didn’t you?”

“I did. But that’s fine.”

“And you’re going through a lot now, too.”

“Judge, I suppose I should say. If possible, I hope to go to the next event in England for a change of pace. Do you think they’ll have one?”

Naruze could tell he was trying to change the subject, so she went along with it.

“Well,” she began.

But a sudden noise other than the steam whistle filled Musashi.

It was a familiar voice blaring from the ship’s external speakers.

“...ait! Wait, Kimi!”

It was Asama. Her voice sounded a bit rushed.

“You need to stop Toori-kun from buying that filthy game!”

Naruze’s expression froze in place as she turned toward the anti-wind walls surrounding Musashi Ariadust Academy. Neshinbara recalled that Okutama’s primary broadcast room was located at about the center, so he looked in the same direction with half-lidded eyes. However, the loud voice continued.

“I have to put the cause of the death on the report to the magistrate’s office, and I don’t want to have to put ‘surprise ascension into heaven due to a shock in a porn game’ or ‘collapsed naked in front of a sign frame displaying a porn game’! And my shrine would fill out a document for the cancellation of his contract, but what will the future generations of the Asama family think when they look through the documents and see ‘reason for contract cancellation: left the earthly plane via porn game’!?”

Asama’s voice was followed by Kimi’s, but Naruze and Neshinbara exchanged a glance.

“Should someone tell them they accidentally turned on the mic?” asked Naruze.

“It’s too late now. ...Oh, but you could send a divine message.”

“Judge,” replied Naruze as she lowered her shoulders and sent a divine message to Asama.

A short moment passed and then...

“Eh? Oh, no! They can hear us outside!? Um, hello, everyone. If you can hear this, please raise your hand. ...Oh, don’t worry, don’t worry. I won’t shoot you if you raise your hand.”

“That stupid shrine maiden. Just because her sanity level is always low is no reason to go completely crazy here.”

“I know what you mean,” said Neshinbara with a sigh.

He looked up into the sky and spoke again after hearing the ship-wide broadcast click off.

“I may be down, but everyone else is full of energy. I want to save them, but I have nothing to save them from when they’re like this.”

A few different people were speaking within a room labelled the “Okutama Central Broadcast Room”.

They were having a simple meeting among the major forces of Musashi.

Asama brought up the first item on the agenda while dressed in her shrine maiden outfit.

“U-um, we chose the broadcast room because it’s soundproofed but ended up having trouble due to accidentally flipping a switch, but that’s over now. Heidi, you said we should have official permission to land soon, right?”

“Judge,” replied Heidi who stood to Asama’s left in the merchant work clothes she wore as her normal clothes.

She and Erimaki opened a few sign frames and she smiled toward Asama.

“We are still only allowed to land on the fourth level, but tomorrow we can use the diplomatic ship to bring all sorts of supplies the transport ship is lacking. Asamachi, Kimi, can you two create a list of what you think the girls might need?”

“...Eh? Eh? With that monster of a girl?” cried Asama while pointing at Kimi.

Kimi on the other hand was already peering at a sign frame along with her Mouse named Uzy.

“Um,” began Asama uncertainly.

The flower of the summit turned toward her.

“What is it, Asama? Just to be clear, I am not trying to send them anything weird.”

“What are you planning to send them?”

“Well, the girls will need supplies to deal with their dry skin and hair. They will also need hairpins and toiletries such as toothbrushes. Also, I’m sure they could use some changes of clothes, some curtains, and some towels.”

Asama looked around the room with a dumbfounded look and then placed a hand on Kimi’s shoulder.

“I never expected a serious response. It looks like you’re actually capable when you try.”

“Heh heh heh. Heretical shrine maiden, an emergency like this is no time to be joking around.”

“Nee-chan! Nee-chan! What should we send for the guys!?”

“Heh heh heh. An excellent question, foolish brother! The guys need nothing other than porn games! But with no PC to install the games on, they can only read the boxes and grooves on the Black Disks while they pleasure themselves with tears in their eyes! That is truly what you call a crying game!”

“Nwaahh! I knew she couldn’t hold back forever! What are you planning to do when England inspects what we’re sending!?”

“Eh? Surely they will understand if the guys place a hand on their shoulder and look them in the eye.”

Asama hung her head and Heidi placed a hand on her shoulder.

“Well, try to come up with a list like that. It would help if you could prepare the spell-related items.”

“Understood. What time will we make the landing?”

“Judge. They have received our request, so we should have approval by morning. It’s convenient that their city runs twenty four hours a day due to all their non-humans. That also means they consume a lot of goods, so we should be able to sell a lot.”

“I see,” commented Urquiaga and Asama before looking to the back of the room.

Everyone followed her gaze. A naked boy was using binoculars to stare out the window toward England.

He’s worried about Horizon, thought Asama. His excitement has been a bit force for these past two weeks.

He showed no sign of brooding over it, but his actions did seem forced.

“We can finally meet up with them tomorrow,” she said loud enough for him to hear.

There was a lot they all had to do.

“Toori-kun, aren’t there some things you have to tell Masazumi when you see her?”

“Eh? D-did I make any mistakes she’s likely to find out about?”

“I won’t ask any further about that, but you should apologize first and foremost. ...And that isn’t what I meant. Masazumi will be the one discussing what relationship we will build with England and what we will do from here on, so she probably wants to hear your opinion.”

“Really?”

Toori turned around with the binoculars still held up to his eyes. With the binoculars in his left hand trained squarely on her breasts, he started grabbing at empty air with his right hand.

“Seijun can make a good decision without my input, can’t she?”

With half lidded eyes, Asama jabbed at the binoculars with her bow. As the idiot held his face and rolled around on the floor, everyone else backed away a bit.

He likes to hide what he really thinks, thought Asama with a sigh.

“Remember what Masazumi said during our class before the attack? She said she would need your decision eventually. Toori-kun, I know you don’t like this kind of thing. I know you don’t like saying it yourself because you have a tendency to take too strong a stance when you do. But...”

Toori remained motionless.

I hope this is getting through to him, she thought. *And I suppose this isn’t my place to talk when I’m not in the student council or the chancellor’s officers.*

A shrine maiden was normally not meant to take part in earthly conflicts. She decided to say nothing more, but Kimi elbowed her in the side. She knew what Kimi meant, but she still turned toward her.

“Wh-what is it?”

“Heh heh. I see you fully intend to get involved in this. How about you ask my foolish brother if there is any way for you to help?”

Toori turned toward them with a question mark expression.

...*Ah.*

He would tell her whether she could be involved or not. She felt her pulse quicken, so she raised her eyebrows and tugged on Kimi’s hand. She then headed for the exit with Kimi in tow.

“H-honestly! We’re outsiders and you’ve told us what you need from us, so we’ll be going!”

Asama was aware she was blushing and that those around her knew it.

“Kimi, the reason you’ve been late to class a lot lately is because you’re waiting until Toori-kun wakes up, isn’t it? It isn’t your fault Horizon is gone, so you don’t have to stick with him.”

“Oh, are you taking me away with you? I quite like it when you get a little forceful.”

“Th-that isn’t what I... H-honestly!”

They had known each other for so long that Kimi could always tell what she was thinking. That made her difficult to deal with. She began half-seriously denying what Kimi said, but Heidi and Urquiaga cut in.

“I think you are quite motherly, Asamachi. You make everyone’s bentos.”

“Yes, but there is a rumor that is only because she made too many grain substitutions as offerings and is making secondary substitutions via others.”

“W-wah! Why would you bring that up now!? And Kimi! Stop trying to slip away from me. Kimi! Listen, Kimi! It’s getting late and you’ll feel terrible tomorrow if you don’t get enough sleep, but...”

Suddenly, the naked boy in the back of the room placed a hand on a desk to help him stand up. He accidentally pressed the button for a divine transmission in the process.

Asama’s voice reverberated throughout the entire ship as she pulled on Kimi’s hand.

“You’ll feel wonderful if you let me take you to bed!”

As Neshinbara and Naruze watched the lights of England from the academy port, they heard something break through the anti-wind wall in front of them.

“Eh?”

They turned around and looked up into the air where a naked boy was sprawled out and spinning vertically through the night sky. Asama’s flustered face and bow appeared in the human-shaped hole in the wall up above.

“H-huh!? He only flew that far because of his boke spell, right!? Right!?”

But before she could check, a transport ship rushing into the port ran into the idiot and knocked him back toward the hole. He rotated in the reverse direction, flew through the hole, and caused another sound of destruction inside the building. It all ended in a “gwaaah!” in Urquiaga’s voice.

The transport ship came to a sudden stop and the crew could be heard speaking.

“Ahh! I just hit someone! D-damn. I thought it was the chancellor, so I panicked and mixed up the gas and the brake!”

“And which one did you intend to use, comrade? If your instinct was the same as mine, drinks are on me tonight. Also, that dent on the front is definitely the chancellor’s outline! You got him!”

“Oh, you’re right! So it *was* the chancellor. That’s a relief.”

Neshinbara saw the two men high-five each other and head back inside the ship while laughing uproariously.

Even at night, everything’s the same as always, he thought with half-lidded eyes.

The person next to him suddenly moved.

The girl had six large black wings on her back. Neshinbara looked up at her where she stood on the railing next to him.

“Naruze-kun, what’s your complaint? You promised to tell me, remember?”

Neshinbara ignored the fact that the black-winged Technohexen did not turn toward him.

“I’ve finished with my complaints, so now it’s your turn. What has you out on the back of the ship tonight?”

The Technohexen nodded slightly.

“Margot is on the other side of the ocean.”

“Then why are you here? I thought the broadcast room was in charge of receiving messages from them.”

“Do you really think she would send me a message? She doesn’t want to worry me, so she won’t say anything. If she sent a poorly-made message, I might suspect she’s forcing it to sound good.”

“Judge. So you worry too much, is that it?” Neshinbara turned toward England. “But I do wonder if she knows what you’re thinking right now.”

“Don’t be stupid, glasses boy. You hope to be a published author like that? Actually, you already had one short story published in a magazine, didn’t you?”

“It was so bad I’d rather forget about it.”

“It still gives you some sort of authority.”

“Judge.” Neshinbara scratched at his head. “But I quit soon afterwards. After all, I was half-worked to death on the student council with no time to focus on writing anything for any more prizes. You can still find the records of me bragging on the divine network, though.” He took a breath. “I hope to catch up with actual results someday.”

“If you keep saying it will be ‘someday’, you will never catch up.”

“You like giving advice, don’t you?”

“You can just say I’m too quick to find fault. As a Technohexen, anything else would be rude.”

Naruze brushed up her hair and reached for her wings. The two wings in the center were her primary acceleration wings that expanded vertically. She rubbed the left one under the joint and stuck her fingers under the feathers.

“It feels a lot better when Naito does it.”

“Someone! Someone, help! There’s a perverted exhibitionist girl over here!”

“Idiot, stop shouting the kind of joke I would expect from the chancellor. This is important. It helps me remain sane while thinking about what I’m lacking. I’m amazed the chancellor put up with this for ten years. And he’s dealing with it now, too.”

“Really?”

“Judge,” said Naruze yet again. “I can tell to a certain extent. You can deal with having someone who won’t even send you a message for fear of worrying you, but it requires trust in them and the ability to find happiness in the fact that someone is thinking about you. Heh heh. I sound like Mitotsudaira.”

“Are Technohexen always this talkative at night?”

“A hopeful author shouldn’t turn into a critic at night,” she said. “But without Weiss Fräulein, I’m just a burden that can’t do anything right. I hate it.”

“I think you did well enough.”

“But I doubt I was able to eliminate Naito’s worries.”

The wind blew through, rustling the black wings of that Weiss Hexen.

“I wanted to show Naito that I was fine on my own and without Weiss Fräulein, but all I did was head out to the front line without thinking and get blown away. ...Even if it was Asama who did that last part.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Well, either way, I’m just a poor actor who has no choice but to get off the stage. You seem to still be on the stage, but I-...” Naruze trailed off and traced her right fingertips across the railing. “No, forget it. I shouldn’t be saying this to you right now. People will continue complaining about you until we know how to deal with England and Tres España. In fact, it will probably get worse. We overcame some skilled people to earn our positions, so people have certain expectations of us. You should continue worrying over the issue until you decide what to about Macbeth.”

And...

“You may not be able to join us with that curse, but find some time to speak with Adele. She is thankful for what you did.”

“Why would she be thankful? I don’t get that at all.”

Neshinbara thought he saw the Technohexen smile.

“Why does everyone in our class like to ignore things that could help them? You’re all so hard to deal with.”

She faced backwards and jumped toward the school building such that she moved down within his vision. Her wings caught the air and produced a clear sound as she gently descended toward the floor.

Despite the distance between them, Neshinbara heard her wings as she landed.

“Is that enough?” he asked.

“Judge. After all, Margot doesn’t like long greetings.”

He heard her feet touch the floor and then heard her spin around. She now had her back turned to him, so he turned back toward the ocean. He did not have enough composure to watch her leave.

He instead listened to her receding footsteps and a voice joined them.

“Neshinbara, I think we are fairly similar.” She took a breath. “And I think you have it worse.”

“Honestly, you go to a lot of trouble, Velázquez. I choose not to carry a handheld, after all.”

That voice could be heard below the night sky.

Two men walked along the central path toward one of the white domed school buildings of Tres España’s Alcalá de Henares.

Walking along that tree-lined and black stone path was a middle-aged man in a worn-out shirt and carrying a paper bag and a long-lived man in a white cloak.

One was Tres España’s Chancellor and Student Council President Felipe Segundo and the other was Secretary Velázquez.

As they walked toward the school building, long-lived Velázquez adjusted his wide-brimmed hat and looked toward the white fortress walls surrounding the school building. He raised a paint-stained sleeve and pointed toward one of the walls.

“That wall is being resurfaced soon, so do you mind if I make a painting on it, boss?”

“The ceramics club from the academy in Salamanca wanted to make a mosaic with blue pottery from Tres Portugal. More importantly, Toledo’s translation center wants you to make some illustrations for a children’s versions of the

Alfonsine tables that they're translating into different languages. Could you focus on that for now?"

"That's based on Mlasi observations, isn't it? P.A.ODA isn't going to sue them over copyright, are they?"

"Testament. This was Juana's idea, so she likely has a way of handling that."

"Boss, you think highly of that girl, don't you?"

"Girl? She's older than me, just like you. You're both long-lived."

"Growing older is not the same thing as feeling time passing slower and feeling useless, boss." Velázquez smiled. "It's said that Tres Españans use the money they have, give in to their passions, have a party, and forget everything unpleasant, but that only applies to the humans. I'm not about to reach that level."

"It doesn't really matter, but could you stop calling me boss?"

"Sure," agreed Velázquez. "Should I call you commander like during Lepanto?"

"I wish we could go back to that time. Back then, we could invite the girl we liked to dance at the *falla* festival and give in to our passions just as the saying goes."

Segundo sighed and adjusted his grip on the paper bag. It contained vegetables, dried foods, smoked foods, and other foods. Velázquez glanced inside the bag.

"Do they never bet alcohol on those chess games?"

"No one is going to bet something more important than their own lives. But I'm sure Juana will be mad that I brought this much back with me. She won't let me bring back anything but fruits and dried foods."

Segundo seemed to suddenly recall something.

"When you see her, tell her to boil the dried foods to get the salt out before giving it to the cats."

“Why don’t you tell her, boss?”

“She hates me.”

“I don’t see you trying to change that.”

As they spoke, they passed through the large gate at the front of the fortress. They passed by the Henares logo and the carved name Takamine Castle which gave the school building meaning for the Far East.

The dome-shaped school building was visible thanks to the lights coming from the rooms and the passageways circling the outer wall at each floor.

Segundo noticed a faint light on one end of the fourth floor.

“Do you think our combined living room has been a bit cramped lately?”

“It’s only until the end of the war with England. I have some work to do in the back, so do your best.”

“You’re abandoning me to Juana’s wrath?”

“Testament. It’s not so bad, boss. If you have a woman scolding you, you aren’t completely lost.”

Velázquez laughed and gave Segundo’s back a push.

Segundo sighed.

“Here I go... Or should I say ‘I’m home’?”

His shoulders drooped as he entered the school building along with Velázquez.

Chapter 14: Distant Affirmers

CHAPTER 14

"Distant Affirmers"



Is the distance between them
Vertical or horizontal?

Point Allocation (Trust)

Is the distance between them

Vertical or horizontal?

Point Allocation (Trust)

Segundo and Velázquez walked down a corridor in Alcalá de Henares.

Segundo's shoulders drooped as he carried a paper bag.

"It's already eleven, but Juana is definitely here. I saw the light in the window. I don't want to go in there."

They arrived at a fork in the corridor. Their options were forward, left, and back.

They began walking more quietly without lowering their speed and they crouched down to peer down the corridor to the left.

"..."

After seeing that no one was there, they entered the corridor. Velázquez took a step ahead of Segundo.

"I see you haven't gotten over that habit, boss."

"Testament. When Juana is with me, she tells me not to sneak around."

"But you're protecting her from danger."

"It's best when they don't notice. Losing someone is the worst, so anything else is fine with me," muttered Segundo.

"I don't think your wife hated you for never coming home," said Velázquez as he pulled his hat down over his eyes. "When the group we gathered together went off to war, she made rice balls for us. And she was looking forward to the *falla*

festival that year, wasn't she? She was thinking about inviting you to dance once the war was over. ...Just like old times, she called it."

"But she would cry a lot. And my own child would ask who I was. Back then may have been a different story, but I'm too old to dance at the *falla* festival now."

"Testament. I guess there's no helping you," said Velázquez. "Then again, it isn't really my place to talk."

"Testament. I can't say it clearly either, so it ends up going unsaid."

"But," began Velázquez. "To bring us back to the present, are you sure that girl hates you?"

"You know how much trouble I cause for her with her job. And she's always scolding me."

"Boss, you haven't been doing any work since she came here. That isn't a good thing."

"She's just too skilled. And to be honest, I still don't know why the previous chancellor recommended me for this position. The only answer I can think of is- ..."

"To push all the blame for Tres España's decline onto you? But you're the hero of Lepanto."

"We lost that battle. I'm only the hero of an interpretative victory. I only survived because I didn't go where I should have. And...I lost something I shouldn't have lost." He let out a sigh as he walked. "I think I am the type of person who loses things. That's all I have ever done. Whether I realize it or not, I'm distracted by what lies ahead, leave things behind, and lose them. When you leave a nation to someone like that, you're telling him to lose the country. They gave me the empire on which the sun never sets so that I could make that sun set and have all of the blame fall on me. Only I could bring that about naturally."

And yet...

“I did my best to fulfill the history recreation. I entered into marriages on paper, I started projects that were likely to fail, and I stamped my seal again and again while telling Tres España to fall into ruin. But you, Juana, and the others arrived later and brought the country back to its feet. No matter how much I try to bring Tres España down, you bring it up even higher. You need to focus on the history recreation more. Not to mention that Juana’s very first move was a bit iffy. The United East India Company may be the first company to issue stock, but the way she earned a nation’s worth of wealth was bordering on insider trading. The Testament Union gave me some nasty looks about that.”

“Why were you protecting this girl you claim hates you, boss? And you shouldn’t have so readily signed her initial ideas to expand Córdoba’s medical center or the library and bookstores at the Al-Andalus academy. She was really mad when she found out you signed them off despite not having anywhere near enough money.”

“She then wanted to use the remaining money to remodel the student council room, but I instead paid for maintenance of the brothels as per the Testament descriptions. I think that’s why she hates me.”

“The existence of the brothels is a conservative honor related to women’s chastity, so you were right to do that. That girl is just a child, is all. Giving the prostitutes regular health examinations and letting the brothels also function as simple hospitals is part of our history recreation as progressive Tres España. It’s funny how that girl has started trying to act like an adult ever since then.”

“Testament. If you provoke her, she won’t back down.”

The two adults nodded to each other as they walked.

“At the end of last year, it came up that Tres España has the Virgin Mary come down the chimney at Christmas instead of Santa Claus and I commented that I wished the student council had our own Mary. While it is true that the Testament descriptions say that Mary coming down the chimney is the Tres Españan style, I

never thought she would do it. It might have been due to Fusae acting like she was going to do it despite having no intention of actually going through with it.”

“The idea is that Mary enters through the fireplace while holding the Son of God in order to dry his swaddling clothes, right? We sure do love Mary in this country, don’t we? Anyway, that girl ended up half in tears because the scenery chimney was too small and her tits and ass got stuck. Unfortunately, the *corregidores* didn’t find it all that funny. ...And who was it who made things worse by inviting kids from orphanages across the country to Henares’s gym?”

“You’re the one who agreed to it. You own a lot of those facilities.”

Segundo stared at the hall ahead as he walked.

“Anyway, Velázquez, I hear a letter arrived from that child.”

“I wouldn’t know. That girl probably has it. She might think it’s from a mistress. The sender is listed as a girl’s name.”

“Ahh... I had thought she was scolding me more recently. Is that why?”

They entered the hall. It was an approximately thirty meter square room with a white round table set in the center, a white bench to the right, and a sign saying “Combined Living Room” at the entrance in the back.

Two guard students wielding spears with a reinforced cowling stood on either side of the entrance and one other person was visible in the hall.

“Oh, Gin.”

“Testament,” answered Gin with a nod. She had just left her private room and now walked toward Segundo. “Chancellor, Lady Juana is waiting for you with your letter. She was using this as a chance to take care of some paperwork and I assisted her with some of the student council work. I realized I was not suited for that kind of work, so I went to my room to perform maintenance on my false

arms. To make a long story short, I might need specialized false arms for the sole purpose of stamping seals.”

“I will ask San Mercado if they have anything like that. No, wait. Fino Alba may be better for that. At any rate, thank you.”

“I always left this to Muneshige and rarely showed up myself, so I learned a lot.”

“For example?”

“Testament.” Gin nodded and stopped directly in front of him. “Lady Juana is a very interesting person.”

“Th-that is a very safe yet troubling thing to say.”

“Is it?” Gin gave a parting nod. “I had not left, so she had me help her with some of the work while she decided to wait for you to return.”

“I get the feeling you’re indirectly blaming me.”

“Testament. However, I am glad I had a way to spend my spare time. When I am alone, I begin worrying. But...”

“?”

“Who is that letter from? Your mistress?”

...This girl shows no mercy!

As Segundo trembled, the guard students stood stock still and held their breath. He was not sure if they were trying to say they had not heard anything or that they had heard but did not care.

Segundo turned to Velázquez who nodded back.

“That letter is from a long-lived orphan.”

“Long-lived...?”

“Yes,” said Segundo. He decided there was no harm in telling her. “That was the one thing I actually achieved at Lepanto.”

“Our survival wasn’t an achievement, boss?”

“I suppose it was. All of you that I saved became wonderful porn game producers. There’s Cervantes and Vega in the literature club, too.”

“Cervantes’s erotic fantasy adventure ‘Dawn Keyhole Tay’ was quite something. That old man knows how to excite the young ones. What kind of old man comes up with something like that ‘Special Attack – Windmill Rotation Strike’?”

“It’s a good thing he was able to use an extreme interpretation of the Crusades and the Silk Road trade to go to Edo in mid-winter to sell his work. Gathering all that foreign currency is huge problem for me, though.”

After turning a half-lidded glare toward Velázquez, Segundo turned back to Gin.

“Anyway, I freed an island populated by the long-lived race during that battle. I was too late for most of them, but I managed to save one girl. She was very scared and hiding in a dugout, but one of Velázquez’s orphanages took her in.”

“That girl writes you letters? Does she know who you are?”

“No.” Segundo shook his head. “I haven’t told her I’m the chancellor and student council president. I haven’t gone to see her either. Velázquez has her send me letters every now and then like I’m her guardian. Honestly, I doubt she would want to know her guardian is the king of debt who must bear Tres España’s decline.” He took a breath. “It must be nice being long-lived. She must be a bit older than you, Gin, but she’s still a child. Her letters are still those of a child, too. After everything I’ve lost, they’re nice to have.”

Segundo then held the paper bag out toward Gin and leaned his entire body toward her.

“U-um, would you like anything from here?”

“Testament. So you are distributing food again? I do not know where you get this, but I will take some vegeta-...”

Gin reached out but then stopped.

“The one who would eat them is still unconscious while undergoing intensive care, so I will wait until next time.”

“Are you sure you don’t want some of the pickled vegetables?”

Gin thought for a moment and finally said “testament” and took some Nappa cabbage. She placed the fingers of her false arm on the cabbage bound together with a string.

“Then I will take this. Thank you very much.” She nodded and began to leave. “I think I will stop by tomorrow as well.”

“Sure.”

The two men nodded toward her parting back. And Velázquez spoke up.

“I guess Tachibana’s wife needs this kind of change of pace, too.”

“I’m being indirectly criticized a lot today. ... Wait, Velázquez, where are you going?”

“I said I have work to do, remember? If I don’t get ready now, I won’t finish by summer.”

“But who knows how she’ll scold me if I’m alone.”

“Have you forgotten how to handle women, boss? You’ve been married and divorced a lot thanks to the history recreation, so you should have this down by now. And you won the usual dried foods, so use that to win her over. You don’t often get to speak with a young woman over food. At least apologize for the trouble you always put her through.”

“If I said that, she would wordlessly drop a pile of paperwork in front of me. Come to think of it, why is someone as skilled as her working for me?”

Segundo glared at the door and lowered his voice because the guards were looking away and pretending not to hear.

“If she took all my authority or I transferred my decision-making power to her, she would have it a lot easier, so why does she bother asking me to make the decisions or asking my opinion? It would be more efficient for her to do it all and I’m sure she knows it. She’s good looking and I doubt anyone would complain if she gained a male inherited name.”

“Boss, she’d scold you if she heard any of that besides the part about her looks. Didn’t you argue over this a long time ago? She said the current situation was fine and you started wandering off more often.”

“I don’t wander off. I go have fun with everyone at the usual place.”

“That’s still wandering off.” Velázquez took a step toward the corridor at the back of the hall, turned around, and pointed forcefully at Segundo. “You should give some positive thought about why that girl is the way she is.”

“Will she stop scolding me if I do?”

“I don’t know,” said Velázquez. “But aren’t you enjoying having a young woman looking after you like this? Why not invite her to the *falla* festival?”

“Españans overthink things by tying everything back to passion.”

Velázquez responded by raising his right hand.

“What a pain,” sighed Segundo before bowing to the guard students.

They frantically straightened up and he reached into his paper bag.

“Sorry about all the trouble. Oh, I was given some edamame, so how about you have them boiled at the cafeteria on your way home? The salt is still a solid rock, but do you want that too?”

“Thank you very much!”

After the two guards took the food, Segundo gave a parting nod and entered the living room.

I hope she doesn't start scolding me right away, he thought as he passed through the door.

The combined living room of Alcalá de Henares's student council and chancellor's officers was a dimly-lit room with windows covering three walls and measuring about thirty square meters.

The lights on the ceiling used Testamento Firma, but they were currently lowered to economize. The lights were low enough that the light from the two moons outside created shadows.

The windows showed the night scenery from the school building's fourth floor and Segundo's desk was located by the back window on the southern side of the room. It was a large desk with an extra desk to the right covered in piles of documents and an extra desk to the left covered in completed documents. Another desk sat perpendicular in front of his desk, creating a T-shape. That was Juana's desk.

A walkway was formed in front of their desks by the lines of desks for the student council members and chancellor's officers. Currently, Tachibana Muneshige's desk was empty and every other desk was cluttered.

The men's desks were mainly covered in their hobby-related items with their work-related items within arm's reach. Their desks were covered in books and the like.

The women's desks were mainly covered in their work-related items with their hobby-related items within arm's reach. Their desks were covered in the individual's preferred decorations.

...Fusae is interested in hot spring trips right now. I should tell Takakane his signed ball has fallen below his desk. Oh, but the Kemari athlete almanacs from the Nara period piled below are about to collapse.

Segundo thought as he tiptoed toward Juana's desk.

Juana's chair was turned so its back was to him. The sleeves of her uniform were spilling over the shoulders of the tall chair back.

He never approached her any closer than two meters. He was short enough that any closer and she would be completely looking down at him. She might even hit him. Not that she had ever hit him in the past.

...It feels like she will, though.

Segundo kept his footsteps as silent as possible, placed the paper bag on Fusae's desk because it was relatively safe, and slid himself around to Juana's side. She was looking down at her own seat. She would of course notice him once he circled around into her field of vision, but he preferred to silently make his way around her first. Having his desk between them as a barricade would help with the damage control.

...What I really need to do is bow down lower than the desk.

Once he circled around to Juana's side, he sped up and started for his own desk.

"...?"

But he stopped when Juana did not react.

He placed a hand on the front of his desk and turned around.

"She's asleep?"

The light was so faint that the moonlight from outside seemed brighter. That light illuminated Juana with her head tilted to the side and her eyes closed. She

removed her usual hat indoors, so her black hair had come a bit undone and covered her cheek.

The guarder covering her right ear had something wrapped around it.

“A compressed sleep charm. Compressed four times? That’s really pushing it. I guess she isn’t going to wake up.”

He glanced at the clock on the wall and saw it was just before 11 at night. When he had shown no sign of returning, she must have decided to sleep until midnight.

...She knew I would bring back something for dinner, didn’t she?

Wicker baskets were sitting on the side of her desk and plates with paper covering something sat on both their desks. Segundo assumed that was what remained of the pies and tarts she had given out to the children. Having those, dried foods, and pickled foods for dinner seemed a bit odd to him.

The cross-style meter displayed on the surface of the charm indicated it still had half of the set amount left. She had likely set it for two hours and those two hours of sleep were worth four times that. The charm shortened one’s sleep time, but it did not control the brain’s chemicals to increase the body’s metabolism. It made the user feel better, but the sleepiness stuck with them for a while afterwards. When the sleep was compressed four times, the user almost never woke up midway through and it took them a while to fully awaken at the end. Segundo did not like that she made regular use of that method.

“She should work for a better country, corporation, or city instead of working for me.”

He scratched at his head and looked at Juana. He tilted his head down so as not to look down with just his eyes.

“Oh, the letter.”

He spotted a familiar envelope among the few she was holding at her chest. She was sitting shallowly in the chair and her hands were lightly in front of her chest.

The letter was held in those hands, so it would be easy to take if he wanted to. He glanced down at the usual white envelope.

“The letters are sent from one of the orphanages Velázquez runs, so why can’t he just bring them to me? Is using the postal service that important? I should ask Muneshige next time I-...”

He mentioned the name of the 1st special duty officer who held an inherited name related to Tres España’s postal service, but he trailed off. He sighed yet again and looked toward the white envelope in the group of envelopes Juana held. It was addressed to him and came from a certain girl.

“She’s long-lived too, so she probably still looks the same age as my daughter,” he muttered.

“Nn...”

Juana must have been having a bad dream because she wrinkled her brow and fidgeted. She slid her butt forward on the chair a bit, the chair rotated, and her legs bent.

“Wah.”

The chair turned to the side so she was now facing him. And...

“...”

Juana let out a breath and her body relaxed. Her clasped hands fell to the armrests on either side of the chair and the envelopes fell to the floor in a clump.

“Wah, wah, wah.”

Segundo frantically crouched down and gathered the letters that had fallen to the floor. It was a wooden floor, so they slid around and were difficult to grab, but he somehow managed to gather them. He then glanced around to make sure he had not missed any.

“Oh.”

A few had landed on Juana's skirt and thighs. He collected four of them there.

"Nn..."

The corners of the letters must have tickled because Juana languidly spread her legs. As a result, a single letter fell between Juana's legs which were spread before Segundo's eyes.

Still crouched down, he began to reach for the letter, but then stopped and lowered his head.

...Wait. I'm not doing anything wrong, am I?

He told himself to calm down and reminded himself that this was his vice president, his subordinate, his colleague, and the person who always scolded him for his constant poor work. In other words, there was no reason to think of her as a female student or a member of the opposite sex. For the time being, he needed to think of her as no different from a tree or a rock.

As he thought, the door suddenly opened and he heard Gin's voice.

"Excuse me. I forgot my-..."

She suddenly stopped.

Segundo gasped and turned toward the false arms girl who had unexpectedly entered the room. He thought about the current situation and realized why she had fallen silent.

"Ah! G-Gin!?" he frantically shouted.

"Testament. Do not worry, chancellor. I understand the situation."

"Y-you do?"

“Testament. To you, she is your vice president, subordinate, colleague, and the person who always scolds you for your constant poor work, and you are attempting to collect the fallen letters. You do not think of her as a female student or a member of the opposite sex. For the time being, you are thinking of her as no different from a tree or a rock.”

Segundo wondered whether she could read his mind or if the situation was simply that easy to grasp.

“Y-yes! That’s exactly it!”

“Testament. Understood. We can say that is what happened.”

“That has a completely different nuance to it!”

“Calm down. Lady Juana is fonder of you than she lets on.” Gin coldly looked down at him. “But I never thought you were the type of man who would bow down to ask Juana of the Eight Great Dragon Kings to spread her legs after you had her pretend to sleep. How very *machismo*. I wish Muneshige had some skill in that area. Good night.”

“Wh-where am I even supposed to start? ...Ah, don’t leave yet!”

“Nn...”

Segundo’s shout and the sound of the closing door brought a look of annoyance to Juana’s sleeping face. She took a deep breath and fidgeted again. She closed her legs, pushing the letter to the ground. Truly thinking that was fortunate, Segundo frantically picked up the envelope and stood up.

...The danger has passed!

He started looking through the letters he had gathered. One was the usual financial report from San Mercado. The god of war unit named Tres Caballero was planning to work alongside the Grande y Felicísima Armada, so it likely had to do with that. He also saw a report on a judgment from the Second High Court of Granada. The letter that had fallen between Juana’s legs was from the Papa-

Schola of K.P.A. Italia, but that lustful pope was probably only sending a seasonal greeting.

“Oh? Where did the letter from that girl go?”

It was missing, so he glanced around until he spotted it.

The white envelope lay between Juana’s breasts like a sword that had been stabbed into her chest. The letters had fallen when she lowered her arms earlier, but the bottommost letter had been pushed between her breasts instead.

Segundo stood perfectly still as he observed the scene before him.

“I thought god was only supposed to send you one trial at a time.”

As he wondered why he had been given a doubleheader, he worked to calm his breathing. He performed five or so 5-digit arithmetic problems in his head to rid himself of worldly thoughts and then faced the problem before him.

It was a simple task. He only had to pull the letter out. That was all. There was nothing to fear.

“ ... ”



He reached out his hand, held the envelope between his index and middle fingers, and pulled.

“Mh?”

It would not come out.

The reason why was obvious.

...There's a great pressure holding it in place. That's all. Calm down. Don't think about this in any more detail than necessary. That's right. Calm down, Felipe Segundo. You are an unappealing man. If she wakes up here, she will not just scold you. You will be burned at the stake for sexual harassment. Can't you hear the charges being read? "Felipe Segundo, you are to be burned at the stake for the crime of sexual harassment by means of placing objects between a subordinate's breasts." No, don't think of the word breasts!

The door opened.

“I am very sorry, chancellor. Once I gave it some thought, I realized an adult like you would not do anything like that to a diligent female teacher type such as-...”

Gin suddenly stopped speaking.

Segundo heard a staticky noise not just with his ears but with his brain and the rest of his body too. His blood seemed to have frozen and he could feel sweat pouring from him.

“G-Gin! I-I can explai-...”

“Testament. We can say that is what happened.”

“Th-that was fast! That was way too fast!!”

“Calm down. I cannot imagine why, but Lady Juana seems to think about you a lot.” Gin coldly looked down at him. “But I never thought you would have Lady

Juana pretend to sleep while you placed objects between her breasts in a sort of cabaret show. You have reached the level of *doble machismo*. I wish Muneshige had some interest in that area. Good night.”

“Wah! What am I even supposed to say to that!? ...Ah, don’t leave yet!”

As he took a step toward the door Gin had closed, he forcefully pulled out the envelope he was holding. The pressure of the breasts squeezed up against it and the sharp corner of the envelope worked together to undo the chest fastener on Juana’s uniform.

“Nn...”

The fastener split all the way down to below her navel, leaving nothing holding the fabric in place. The skin of her breasts could be seen rising and falling with her breaths.

“ ... ”

Segundo gathered every single one of his skills to grab the blanket sitting in the corner of the room for naps and then place it over Juana. After doing so in only a second and a half, he caught his breath, removed the paper from the plate on his desk, and took a bit of the apple pie beneath.

...Oh, the sweetness has more depth than last time.

She had likely used unpurified sugar instead of the purified white kind. White sugar had a more direct sweetness and its color was wonderful, but the unpurified kind gave a variant depth to the flavor.

The children in the hospital would not have many sweet things to eat, so the latter was likely the better option.

She can do so much already, but she continues to learn and grow, he thought as he licked off his fingers.

The long-lived race belonged to a former noble family of the Far East. Segundo had Far Eastern blood in him too, but he had heard his ancestors worked for those nobles.

“So why is she working for me now?”

As he thought, he placed the white envelope in his breast pocket, grabbed a pen from his desk, and wrote a short message on the paper that had covered the plate.

He wrote, “You were asleep, so I left with Gin. Thank you for the pie.”

He chose not to mention anything about the letter. Even if she had been asleep, it would hurt her pride to know she had dropped it. She would prefer to think he had simply taken it. He also had to catch up to Gin, so he was not technically lying. From what he wrote, she could assume Gin handled the blanket as well.

...I'll leave her with the usual dried foods.

He began to walk past Juana as she slept beneath the blanket.

“Ah...”

She let out a groan that seemed to be seeking help.

It almost sounded like she was saying “help me”, so Segundo stopped.

He looked over to find her wrinkling her brow and tightly grasping the armrests below the blanket.

During compressed sleep, one switched between shallow sleep and deep sleep and one would dream during the shallow sleep. Also, the dreams would be compressed, too.

“Ah...” she said again, but she was still facing down.

...It's as if she's giving up.

Segundo reached out a hand, but...

“Sorry.”

He could not hold her hand while she grasped the armrest, so he placed his hand over hers through the blanket.

“ ... ”

The harsh look left her face and her breathing finally calmed.

“Good.”

Segundo slowly removed his hand, took a few items from his paper bag, placed them on Juana’s desk, adjusted the blanket so it would not fall from her, and finally left the room.

He carried the lighter paper bag in his arms and the letter in his breast pocket.

“Dear, mister.

How are you doing? I am doing well. I am studying, but I am eating properly, playing, and getting enough sleep too.

It has been a month since I started going to the academy. I still do not have many friends, but I will be fine as long as I have you. There are books here, so I can get by on my own.

There have been clouds in the sky recently.

Did you know there are a lot of ships in those clouds? Everyone at the academy is talking about war.

Are you going to war?

You saved me.

I do not like war, but you and the others saved me last time.

If there is another war, will you save me again?

When I see someone afraid of the word war, I tell them about you. I tell them it will be okay because you will come help us if something happens.

If there is another war, will you save me again?

I hope what I said does not become a lie.”

“It’s hard to say,” muttered Segundo as he walked in the moonlight. “ ‘Mister’ would go save you. That’s for sure. He would take you from the darkness and into the light.”

But...

“But what about the current ‘boss’?”

He looked up into the sky.

“What will he do? Will he be able to protect you and a whole lot more?”

He had no answer.

He only saw the night sky overhead that was so clear it felt cold.

He walked below that sky that grew more sharply transparent the later the night grew.

...That question and answer will likely be tested during the coming war with England.

Chapter 15: Immigrants to England

CHAPTER 15

"Immigrants to England"



If you travel to a distant land
And decide to live there
Does it count as distant anymore?
Point Allocation (Location)

If you travel to a distant land

And decide to live there

Does it count as distant anymore?

Point Allocation (Location)

The morning sun filled a classroom.

A woman wearing glasses and a nametag reading “Sanyou” stood in front of a blackboard.

“Anyway, during the middle ages, England and España were considered rural areas by the rest of Europe. England was originally populated by the Celtic fairies known as the Britons, but at about 54 BC, everyone’s beloved Caesar crossed the sea while invading Gaul.”

Sanyou drew a simple map of England and the northern coast of Hexagone Française on the blackboard and drew an arrow from the latter to the former.

...Caesar did a lot.

Caesar went on to conquer the western side of Hexagone Française which was known as Gaul at the time. He detected Rome planning to betray him out of fear of his growing power and popularity, so he advanced on Rome and became a dictator. As he did, he had to make the decision to cross the small river known as the Rubicon which acted as the borderline between Rome and Gaul. However, the soldiers knew what happened thanks to the Testament, so they got excited and began crossing the river ahead of Caesar. The way he frantically shouted “The die has been cast!!” and rushed after them was quite well known.

...All of this is so much fun, but I spent way too much time on it last year.

“At about 40 AD, Rome invaded England and it became a province of Rome. However, Rome’s rule was lax and they primarily viewed it as useful for what it

produced. But after Rome's fall, the Celtic fairies began fighting amongst each other for power."

Sanyou checked the pace at which everyone was copying down the information on the board and wrote "king" above England.

"That was the age of Arthur Pendragon or King Arthur. He is a legendary figure and he is modeled on around three different people, so there were problems deciding who was the real one during the history recreation. They had no choice but to form a group known as B.W.T. and hold the Celtic Cup King Arthur Tournament, but that did not solve anything. They ultimately had no option but to take turns filling the role. That is why King Arthur has become a legendary figure known for being cheated on by his wife and..."

Sanyou trailed off and grew lost in thought at that last statement, but a student called out to her.

"Don't worry! Don't worry, sensei! If you cheat at the level of being acquaintances, it counts as an accident!"

Insurance pays out for an accident, but do you have to pay out of your own pocket otherwise? wondered Sanyou. *Well, enough of that...*

She took a breath.

"Anyway, he worked hard and kept the Germanic Saxons from invading. The weapon he used was Excalibur which is what blasted Musashi the other day. That sword awaited a king while stabbed into a rock and Arthur managed to pull it out. It defended England and confirmed him to be king. But..."

Sanyou stopped there. King Arthur was often used in video games, novels, and divine television dramas. There had recently been a retro boom in which ancient stories were brought back and the legend of King Arthur was no exception. The popular ongoing manga "Pendragon Ball – Super Knights of the Round Table" had introduced a new twist to the holy grail legend. When one gathered the seven holy grails, Merlin would appear and grant a single wish. In the current week's chapter, King Arthur was being mocked by the Saxons for the death of his friend.

Arthur had just shouted “Are you talking about Percival!?” and transformed into a Super Celt when the chapter ended.

Sanyou and Vice Principal Yoshinao would read the weekly magazines confiscated from students.

...Galahad's Fairy King Fist x3 wasn't any help at all.

At any rate, the lesson was approaching that sort of interesting topic.

She might end up straying off topic from here on out.

...But it may be necessary for them to remember the material.

To remember so much, the information needed impact and variety. They might not be able to remember every little detail right away, but remembering the important points would lead to remembering the smaller facts.

And so Sanyou decided what to say next.

“Do you know the mystery surrounding the two Excaliburs and Excalibur's scabbard?”

Sanyou saw the students suddenly look up with interest.

They reacted well to objects commonly used in stories. It helped that they had recently been rattled by Excalibur. Sanyou had expected interest, but the strength of their gazes was more than she had anticipated.

...Oh? Ohh? I-I need to live up to their expectations. Otherwise, they will lose faith in me as a teacher. But I need to keep this short or it will be Rome all over again. Getting off track to help them remember everything will be repeating the same mistake I made last year. I need to avoid doing that. S-so keep this short. Short, short, short!

“Th-the end!”

“That’s too fast, sensei!”

Oh, no. I rushed to the conclusion too quickly, thought Sanyou with an embarrassed smile.

“Um, okay. About the mysteries. King Arthur broke Excalibur once. That was because he left the path of chivalry by attacking from behind, but he received a new sword afterwards. Some stories say he got it from the wizard Merlin and some say it was from the Lady of the Lake. This was solved in the history recreation with a double inherited name.

“The new one was known as Ex. Caliburn and it came with a scabbard. That scabbard was a divine weapon and it held a protective power that prevented the wielder from losing any blood. This made the king of England, and therefore England itself, immortal. However, the scabbard was stolen by Arthur’s half-sister Morgan and Arthur died. Try to remember this part. And...”

And...

“There are some mysteries surrounding this story. The current sword, Ex. Caliburn, is known as the second Excalibur, so where did the original one, Ex. Collbrande, go? And where did the scabbard end up? There are a lot of strange aspects to this story. Ex. Caliburn appears to the king or queen of England just like the original Excalibur and it also carries out air defense, but where are the broken Ex. Collbrande and the lost scabbard of Ex. Caliburn? Those are two small mysteries concerning England’s history recreation.”

Sanyou looked around the classroom.

She took a breath when she noticed the students were quietly staring back at her.

“Does anyone have a question?”

One girl raised her hand. She was a water spirit with damp hair. Sanyou’s student records said she was originally from Ireland. Musashi was currently floating in the sky south of England, so she could likely feel the air of her homeland.

Everyone turned toward the girl and she spoke once Sanyou gave an encouraging nod.

“Are the people of England descendants of King Arthur?”

Sanyou was unsure what to say. The water spirit girl’s question was not directly related to world history. It had more to do with ethnology.

However, she had to answer a student’s question in some way. That desire for an answer was something she had to encourage.

“That is a good question,” she said to indicate the value of asking questions.

Sanyou then began thinking about how to tie this question into world history. She thought and thought but could not think of anything.

...*U-um...*

“Th-th-th-th-the-the-the thing is... U-u-um-um-um-um, Arthur, Arthur, Arthur, Arthur...”

“S-sensei! Stop rapping and calm down!!”

...*Shut up. I am calm. I only sounded a bit like a DJ because I’m flustered.*

At any rate, Sanyou tapped on the map of England and Hexagone Française on the blackboard. She got chalk dust on her fingertips, but she did not care.

“To learn whether the British are descendants of King Arthur or not, we must look at England’s history from King Arthur to Fairy Queen Elizabeth. There are three major historical issues to focus on.”

First, Sanyou drew an arrow leading to England from the side.

“The first happened in the 11th century. The Duchy of Normandy, an area on the northern coast of France, crossed the ocean and invaded England from the south. They eventually conquered England. This was known as...”

Norman Conquest: England conquered by the Normans.

“The role of the Normans was played by French non-human races in the history recreation. What we commonly refer to simply as England was already split into four countries at the time. Wales, Scotland, and Ireland were primarily occupied by the Celtic fairies, but England was occupied by the Anglo-Saxons. In the history recreation, the non-human races (also known as Glossolalians) played that role. This included fairies, demons, beasts, and other races. This meant the Anglo-Saxons were racially similar to the French non-humans of the Normans, so the conquest progressed relatively smoothly. However, the other three blocks of the floating island refused to get along with England once it was ruled by those non-humans. Several times, England became involved with the French throne due to their French blood, but they lost the Hundred Years’ War, lost their land in Normandy, and England’s conquerors effectively left. You could say it became its own country again.”

So...

“This makes it difficult to say whether the people of England are descendants of King Arthur. England was ruled by the Normans, but the other regions were occupied by the Celts and Anglo-Saxons. However, just as the French claim to have authority as descendants of Charlemagne, the British raise their own morale by claiming to be descendants of King Arthur. In other words, he is treated the same way other countries treat their emperor or pope. He is a hero regardless of ethnicity. Now, if we continue forward in time...”

As the class watched her and nodded, Sanyou held up two fingers on her right hand.

“The second issue comes in at 1485. In order to help England recover after the Hundred Years’ War and the Wars of the Roses, Henry VII began the Tudor dynasty. As a king from Wales, he claimed to be a descendant of King Arthur and

the people supported him. As a king of the people, he suppressed the nobles and paved the way to England's absolute monarchy."

Also...

"If you think about it, you can see why the current Queen Elizabeth is known as the Fairy Queen. England's royal family is surrounded by legends and they stand above the nobles as kings and queens of the people. But..."

Sanyou wrote a few names on the blackboard.

After writing Henry VII, Henry VIII, Mary I, and Elizabeth, she stopped.

"Then we come to the third issue. Henry VII's son, Henry VIII, changed the official religion of England from Catholicism to the Anglican Church. He did so to solve problems concerning an heir and as a countermeasure against interference from France. The former is easier to focus on, but the kings had a good reason to suppress the Catholic Church and nobles connected to it. This prevented France and the pope from interfering via the church. Also, shutting down the Catholic monasteries forced them to hand over the private assets they had gained with the authority the Catholic Church granted them. Simply put, the Catholics within England were destroyed and forced to hand over their money."

The class held their breath.

"England itself switched to the Anglican Church, but the other three countries remained Catholic because they relied on Catholicism. France aided those three countries, so the three Catholic countries opposed England. After Henry VIII's death, a conflict surrounding three women began."

Sanyou drew a line between Henry VIII and Elizabeth's names on the blackboard.

Mary Tudor: Previous queen. Also known as Mary I. Attempted to return England to Catholicism.

Elizabeth: Current queen. Showed tolerance by making the Anglican Church more Catholic.

Mary Stuart: Catholic queen of Scotland.

Once she finished writing all that, Sanyou took a breath and looked across the class.

“Of the two Marys, Mary Tudor is known as Bloody Mary due to slaughtering people connected to the Anglican Church. The other one, Mary Stuart, fled to England during a civil war in Scotland. In accordance with the Testament descriptions, she was imprisoned on the charge of attempting to assassinate Elizabeth and will be executed. Because two Marys exist in almost the same period of time, the history recreation gave Mary Stuart a double inherited name with Elizabeth’s half-sister, Mary Tudor. She has the Urban Name of Double Bloody Mary and she became an obstacle and enemy of Elizabeth.”

Sanyou looked at her students. All of them were looking diligently back at her, so she slowly continued.

“Double Bloody Mary is currently imprisoned in the Tower of London and she will wait there until the time comes for her execution. Essentially, the Fairy Queen who holds the blood of King Arthur in her veins gained a political victory. That sums up the situation in England leading from King Arthur to the Fairy Queen.

“I think the descendants of King Arthur in modern England would be those of Celtic descent, but he is the hero who forms the mental foundation of the entire kingdom. Just as Excalibur is stabbed into a ley line, I think everyone in England may have a sort of shared ancestry. In other words, if you honor the name of King Arthur and possess a just desire to protect England, then you are effectively his descendent.”

Sanyou let out a breath and realized something was wrong.

...Huh?

Silence was usually what one wanted from students.

...But this is different from usual.

She tried to realize what was different and finally figured it out.

“The next class sure is quiet,” she muttered.

Everyone turned to the back of the classroom.

The back wall contained a blackboard in the center. Either side of the blackboard was coated with fresh plaster, but the white plaster formed about seven overlapping human outlines.

...Oh, right.

Tres España had attacked, the transport ship had crashed, and England had not allowed those aboard the transport ship to return, so around half of Oriotorai’s class plum was stuck in England.

Aoi Toori remained on Musashi, but he had been mostly ignored because he was of little use. Shirojiro had managed most everything and the representative committee had handled the actual work.

The 2nd-year committee and the other committees had made a lot of objections, but had changed little.

...Everyone has it tough.

However, a diplomatic ship was now allowed to land on England’s fourth level. A day for negotiations had yet to be set, but Oriotorai had likely taken the rest of class plum to England now that they could land. That was why no noise was coming from the neighboring classroom.

“It’s so peaceful without them.”

The entire class nodded in response and Sanyou thought that was an appropriate reaction. But then she heard a shout from outside the window.

“King! I’ve come to make a direct appeal! We’ve had enough of that idiot Toori! We want Masazumi-sensei back!”

Hearing the cry of a child, Sanyou glanced outside. For some reason, an elementary school boy was naked and had “bastard” and other derogatory words written on him in ink.

“Every single day, that idiot makes jokes, reads aggressive kamishibai, swipes our food during cooking class, and makes bets with enemas as the punishment for losing! We haven’t been learning anything! Please do something as king! If that idiot keeps teaching us, our lives are over! Most of the boys in the class have already been brainwashed! They’ve started the Nudist Church and the International Groping Alliance, and I have no idea what’s going on anymore!”

The boy held a bamboo pole with a written appeal to the king attached on the end. Meanwhile, Vice Principal and Musashi King Yoshinao wore agricultural work clothes.

“Hm. So that idiot is up to no good again. And this time he is tormenting our innocent boys and girls.”

“King! What do you mean ‘again’!? Has there been another victim!?”

That victim is standing right in front of you, thought Sanyou before calling out to Yoshinao from the window.

“Um, Vice Principal Yoshinao! The chancellor and the others are at England right now.”

“Yes, we were planning to stop by later with some vegetables, but Musashi is quite peaceful for the moment. More importantly, Vice President Honda-kun will be back soon. Listen, boy. We will use our authority to immediately bring peace and normalcy back to your lessons.”

You have no way of guaranteeing that, thought Sanyou as an adult, but the child seemed to believe him.

“R-really!? That idiot will be gone and Masazumi-sensei will be back!?”

Sanyou sighed as she saw the boy begin to cry tears of joy.

As she watched the king nodding to the boy, she realized he had changed quite a bit. His current outfit made that clear.

...I heard he's helping with the farming and selective breeding of decorative plants.

His old land had been in a rural area, so she had heard he was knowledgeable about that kind of work. That knowledge would likely be very useful to Musashi in its current state.

...Once Makiko and the others meet up with those in England, will they be able to gather their own knowledge and learn what they did wrong in the attack?

Sanyou did not know the answer, but she turned back toward her class.

“I wonder what the chancellor and the others are doing right now.”

An ocean jutted out from a cliff.

This shallow ocean continued for several kilometers past the shore and fell off into the sky after passing over a few drops in height.

Fish swam in that ocean, but other forms could also be seen swimming under the water or appearing on the surface.

Most of these other forms were humanoid or bestial spirits and they were all currently looking up into the blue sky.

A ship was visible there. It was a large ship decorated with an outer shell. The side of the ship bore the crest of Musashi Ariadust Academy and the logo portion had been swapped out with Musashi's crest. This was Musashi's diplomatic ship.

The ship approached the shore which was made up of exposed rock.

Something rose from the ocean like a tower just in front of the shore. This was the transport ship which stood on end and had been thoroughly dented and smashed.

The diplomatic ship produced the sound of air being pushed out of the way as it approached the transport ship which had spray shooting up from its waterline.

Figures began to appear on the vertical deck of the transport ship, but a single figure suddenly began running toward the bow of the diplomatic ship.

“Horiiiiiiizon! I'm coming!!”

The boy running atop the railing on the edge of the deck held up a hover charm.

“Toh!!”

They had yet to completely approach the transport ship, but he jumped forcefully toward it. He needed to clear about fifty meters to make the jump, but the hovering charm extended his jump time even if it did not increase his speed.

“First one aboard!!”

Those aboard the transport ship reacted as he leaped toward them with his lips puckered for a kiss.

A girl with a ponytail and spear and a girl wearing the coat of a male uniform appeared on the stern of the ship. They carried out a short but serious discussion, the one in the coat clearly pointed toward the idiot, and the one with the spear took action.

“Bind, Tonbokiri!”

She cut his hovering charm and he fell toward the ocean.

The two girls sent a semaphore signal to the bow of the diplomatic ship and nodded toward the other students preparing for the approach of the ship. They all exchanged a nod.

“Continue your work!!”

That cry signaled the reunion of Musashi’s main forces after two weeks apart.

Chapter 16: Interceptor in a Place of Peace

CHAPTER 16

"Interceptor in a Place of Peace"



What causes a commotion?
The heart? The body?
Or the people involved?
Point Allocation (Control)

What causes a commotion?

The heart? The body?

Or the people involved?

Point Allocation (Control)

Masazumi and Mitotsudaira watched the preparation from the transport ship's deck.

“Despite being oriented differently by ninety degrees, we can still transfer cargo,” muttered Masazumi in an impressed tone.

Thick ropes were being used in place of a bridge between the transport ship and the diplomatic ship. On the ropes' surfaces, the gravity control was set to coincide with normal gravity.

...But do they have a way of resolving the deviation with our gravity control?

The diplomatic ship was oriented horizontally while their ship was vertical. The cargo transfer was being carried out manually using thick ropes. The students walking back and forth across those ropes started off standing straight up and they would tilt 90 degrees to the side partway through, but they did not fall.

“The pump and boiler being brought in today should completely change our lifestyle. We're also getting changes of clothes and better food. I have a feeling we're going to have another extravagant festival tonight.”

“Isn't sensei aboard that ship? In that case...”

Masazumi and Mitotsudaira both narrowed their eyes.

“We're having yakiniku tonight.”

“Judge. That's for sure.”

Just as Mitotsudaira muttered that, they heard a female voice coming from the stern cargo entrance to their right.

“Ah, Mito! Masazumi! Are you two okay!?”

They turned around and found a familiar face at the stern.

It was Asama.

She waved and then ran toward them as if falling down from the sky.

Asama caught her breath in front of her two classmates.

She then looked up at them.

“Oh, you look so exhausted. ...Are you sure you’re okay?”

Masazumi and Mitotsudaira exchanged a glance and then nodded.

“Really?”

“I can’t be 100% sure, but I think so.”

The two of them had likely been looking after their health, but they looked more tanned and a bit skinnier than two weeks before. Most of all, their clothes and hair were incredibly worn out.

...They’ve been washing them with nothing but water.

Asama had heard they had no changes of clothes, so they must have had to wrap themselves in a blanket and hole up in their space while their clothes dried. The same went for their hair. Mitotsudaira’s was especially bad. It had lost its volume and shine. It looked 20% smaller than usual.

Their situation seemed horrible, but Asama could also see the boys carrying some kind of giant stone currency, working to dry materials in the sun, and worshipping a spear-shaped idol made from leaves and shells.

...They've made some odd local rules.

They appeared to be returning to nature or living freely, but it was more likely some of them had gone crazy being trapped in that ship and so they had awakened to their savage side and started a cult. Even Masazumi and the others may have been influenced by them, so something had to be done about it. First, Asama had to make them civilized again. The easiest method would be to pumping them full of Shinto purification power via a full-strength arrow, but that would be too much of a physical shock to use on her classmates.

“Well, anyway, everything will be fine. I stopped Kimi from sending all sorts of unnecessary things and I prepared some proper supplies for the girls. Yes, I brought charms for you. Including ones in the form of combs for washing your hair and ones made of cloth for purification. If in the future you wish to use them or any other service from Shirasago Enterprises or the Asama Shrine, please stop by the shrine and provide a pure offering.”

“Why did that turn into a sales pitch at the end?”

...Whoops. I slipped into the ship-wide commercial I practiced for the other day.

But she had another more important issue to discuss.

“Um, did Toori-kun arrive onboard earlier?”

The other two girls exchanged a glance and Masazumi finally began to speak.

“He went below.”

“Below? You mean into the ship?”

The two exchanged another glance and this time Mitotsudaira spoke up.

“No. He went straight down.”

“Hm? ...Where was he in such a hurry to get?”

They exchanged another troubled glance and whispered a few words to each other before Masazumi spoke again.

“Explaining this will be too much trouble, so let’s skip ahead. What do you need with Aoi?”

As soon as she asked that, they heard a girl scream from down below.

“Kyaaaah! The chancellor! The chancellor just came from the sea! And he has seaweed on his crotch!!”

After three seconds of silence, Asama made eye contact with the other two girls in front of her.

They all nodded and took action simultaneously. Asama pulled a bow from her skirt, Masazumi put on her gloves while narrowing her eyes, and Mitotsudaira let her chains dangle down from her wrists.

Everyone around them backed away in fright, but they did not care. Asama urged Masazumi on with a nod and spoke.

“Let’s go. If we do not purify him with the actions of civilized people, this could get dangerous.”

“But what does the chancellor want?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” asked Asama. “Horizon’s breasts. What else?”

Screams filled the ship.

They were caused by Toori who was nude and held piles of seaweed in each hand like a cheerleader’s pom-poms. He ran around while mounting the seaweed on his crotch and then throwing it at the innocent people of the ship.

Those people had lived for two weeks without rebellion from within or enemies from without, so their life of fishing had been peaceful and fulfilling. They reacted with fear to this destroyer from the outside world who had crossed the ocean to reach them.

In almost no time at all, a rule was created saying anyone hit by the seaweed was cursed because they had caught the “Toori germs”. More and more people were infected with no way of fighting back.

The students in charge of handling disasters within the ship checked the display on the wall which showed the status of the different parts of the ship. They saw it filling with red, starting from the stern of the ship.

“D-dammit! This floor is done for, too! Everyone, get out of here while I close the shutter!”

“I-I can’t let you take all the glory for yourself! We’re comrades who ate the same fish together!”

Seaweed flew and two more were out.

Just before the others managed to fully close the wooden fire-resistant shutter, a naked boy slid head-first underneath it on his back. He attacked and hit three more.

“Gwaaaaah! Wh-what is with this seaweed!? It’s disgustingly warm!”

“Geh geh geh geh. Not far to Horizon’s bedroom now! Nighttime visit mode!!”

The party of three pursuing girls rushed toward that voice, but before they could catch up, the naked boy arrived at the backmost room which was labelled “Horizon-sama’s Bedroom”.

“Excuse me!!”

As the seaweed boy charged in, he saw a silver-haired automaton sleeping on the bed built in the back of the room and a ponytailed female warrior with her back to

him. The naked boy ignored the warrior and tried to make a dash for the bed, but she quickly noticed his presence.

“Mh? I sense a deadly attack!”

She picked up Tonbokiri and held it up to her right.

Directly afterwards, she lifted up Tonbokiri’s handle so it shot up between the seaweed boy’s legs as he tried to pass by her. It struck his crotch from below and he reflexively turned his legs inwards. She continued raising the spear’s handle and he was forced onto his tiptoes.

“Ahii! Ahh! Wait! Stop, stop, stop, stop! I didn’t know you were into this!”

“Quiet. This is Horizon-sama’s bedroom.”

“Y-y-you samurai girl! Stop acting like the guy standing at the village entrance in an RPG and pay attention to what you’re doing! Right, Tonbokiri!?”

“Please stop,” protested the spear.

“Bear with it, Tonbokiri,” urged Futayo. “If we can buy time here, our comrades are sure to arrive!”

“Endure.”

As soon as Tonbokiri displayed that message, three girls who were mostly wielding weapons charged through the door behind them. Their shoes skidded across the ground as they quickly put a stop to their dash and they looked at the idiot in surprise.

“T-Toori-kun! Wh-what are you doing to Tonbokiri!?”

“What!? I think it’s the one doing something to me! I feel like I made it to third base after your hit!”

“Enough of that,” said Masazumi as she took a step into the room.

Just as she did, the idiot twisted around to face her and his hand hit the switch for the automatic extension device added to Tonbokiri for fishing.

The device extended by six meters. Due to the additional springs added in and the fact that Futayo was holding the front end of the spear in her hand, the back end shot backwards toward the three girls with the naked boy riding it like a wooden horse.

“Kyaaaaah!!”

The girls frantically returned to the hallway while the naked boy and the spear’s handle shot out along with them. However...

“Return,” announced the spear’s display.

With the same force as it had shot out with, the handle was sucked back into the room with the naked boy still riding it.

While holding Tonbokiri, Futayo watched the idiot leave and return.

“What in the world are you doing?” she asked.

“That’s what I want to know! Are you quite done!?”

The idiot struck a pose with the spear held between his legs which happened to hit the switch again.

“Ah?”

“Kyaaaaah!!”

Masazumi and the others had started to return from the hallway, so they were forced to scream and back off once more. But when the idiot was immediately brought back inside the room, he held some seaweed out toward Futayo.

“U-um! This is starting to get fun!” he shouted.

This time, Futayo wordlessly hit the switch.

“Kyaaaah!!”

“This is not at all fun for me,” she commented.

“U-um? Are you one of those traps in side-scrollers that shoots up from below when you jump!?”

Because he spoke back to her, Futayo hit the switch again. The three girls in the hallway made their own plans as Futayo and the idiot had this exchange.

“U-um, I will create a net with my silver chains, so you fire an arrow at him, Tomo. Masazumi, you finish him off with a lecture. That way-...kyaaaah!?”

However, the idiot used the back and forth motion to his advantage.

He pressed his hands down on the spear’s handle to vault over it. He then used his momentum to dash past Futayo.

His destination was the bed in which Horizon slept. He puckered his lips up for a kiss.

“H-Horizon! It’s time for your morning grope!”

“Ah, wait, Aoi! Horizon has been sleeping excessively ever since punching you in the crotch!”

“Th-that isn’t why she is sleeping, is it?” asked Asama.

Meanwhile, the seaweed boy arrived within two steps of the bed and lowered himself down.

“Horiizzon!”

“What is the meaning of all this noise?”

Horizon suddenly sat up and used her hips to send a low punch into the idiot’s crotch.

A sharp noise rang out, the idiot trembled from the impact, and he stopped moving. However...

“...?”

Horizon frowned and looked at her fist. It was touching the clump of seaweed mounted on his crotch. That had stopped her strike.

“Heh. Too bad, Horizon. Your punch cannot reach me!”

The seaweed boy slowly struck a pose.

“After my previous defeat, I realized my feelings would not reach you. Someone then attempted to hang me and I was thrown out into the sky!”

“Hm. People do some horrible things,” commented Futayo.

“Indeed,” added Tonbokiri.

“O-okay. Stop making oddly suspicious comments along with your pet! Anyway, Sea God Poseidon noticed my brave, rabbit-like heart, told me he would grant me sturdy armor to protect me from any further crotch punches, and gave me this prolific seaweed armor which is filled with minerals! So, um, Horizon, your punches can no longer affect me!!”

Horizon expressionlessly pulled back her fist.

She had grabbed the seaweed, so the idiot’s crotch was now exposed.

“Eh? Ah! Wait, wait, wait, wait!”

As the god mosaic appeared, the idiot put on a flirtatious tone and made an oddly refreshing smile.

“Horizon, you always know just how to remove the shell from my heart.”

Horizon threw a punch with her other fist.

As Masazumi heard the impact, the idiot trembled and fell to his knees.

After his head hung down and he collapsed forward, Horizon placed the seaweed on his head like a crown.

“If you keep running around naked, you will catch a cold.”

“W-what!? Is it just me or does that have nothing to do with punching me!?”

“Those are two different things.”

“Yes, that’s what I’m saying!!”

...I have to agree with him on this one.

Masazumi frowned as she watched on.

“Horizon?” she asked.

Horizon turned toward her and lightly raised her hand with no expression on her face.

“Judge. I apologize, but I am currently refining myself in a variety of ways, so I have entered rest mode. I will now be going to sleep once more.”

Horizon wiped her hand on Masazumi’s coat, listened to Masazumi scream, and lay down once more.

She pulled the blanket up over her chest and gave a thumbs up.

“Good night, everyone.”

She then closed her eyes and went to sleep.

Masazumi and the other two in her group reflexively returned the thumbs up, but they and Futayo finally exchanged a glance.

“I suppose I should expect nothing less of Horizon-sama.”

“Has she been sleeping this entire time?” asked Asama.

“No.”

Masazumi shook her head, but she was not sure how to explain it. She frowned and looked up at the ceiling.

“Hm... She only wakes to eat and visit the bathroom. And she almost never speaks. She only gives simple greetings and then goes back to sleep like just now.”

“Judge. And we suspect she is sleeping due to an automaton self-preservation mode kicking in.”

“I see,” said Asama with a nod. She turned toward the collapsed naked boy. “Then that punch just now was not her true self. She detected danger as an automaton and her self-preservation mode activated.” She let out a sigh of relief. “I’m a bit relieved. I knew Horizon was cement-like, but I was worried it had grown worse than it used to be.”

Horizon suddenly sat up and turned to Asama.

“To be perfectly honest, that punch truly came from me. Good night.”

And she went back to sleep. Asama was dumbfounded, but she soon grabbed at Masazumi’s collar and began shaking her back and forth.

“U-um, is Horizon really sleeping!? Is she!? Is she!? Wait, Mito, Masazumi! Stop looking away!!”

“A-anyway, let’s carry the chancellor out. Um, silver chains? Silver chains?”

Mitotsudaira tugged on the chains, but they were already as tense as they could get.

“Huh?”

Mitotsudaira looked over to find the silver chains wrapped around a pillar in the hallway or clutching to the wall.

“Come on, silver chains. Get in here. Stop that and get in here!”

One of the silver chains lifted up one end and wrote a word in midair.

“No.”

“Um, silver chains? Have you forgotten how often I tell you not to be picky? No matter who it is, you must grab them or crash into them. Now get in here!”

Mitotsudaira tugged on the chains, but they held on so tightly that the entire ship began to creak.

“Wait, wait, wait!”

Masazumi stopped Mitotsudaira and sighed.

“Honestly,” she muttered as her shoulders drooped. “I feel like our usual life has returned all at once.”

Once the commotion on the transport ship died down, the cargo transfer resumed.

Those who were not used to working on ships were walking delicately across the thick ropes between the two ships. On the other hand, others were walking back and forth with no problem.

“Wow, Suzu-san! You can walk across just fine! I-I can’t stand this kind of thing.”

Adele would stop each time the thick twisted rope shook, so Suzu turned back toward her and tilted her head.

“This rope...is the same as...a passageway. It’s just...twisted.”

“Th-that twisting is the problem! Um, am I supposed to-...”

“Quit talking and get going!”

A line was forming behind Adele and Persona-kun was already preparing to crawl across, so things were bound to back up even further. However, Suzu took Adele’s hand.

“Don’t...worry.”

Suzu found it strange to pull on someone else’s hand to lead them. Instead of having someone lead her where everyone was able to go, she was leading someone where everyone had difficulty going.

However, something had been bothering her ever since approaching England. She would hear a certain noise occasionally.

“...?”

“Um, what is it, Suzu-san?”

“Hm ...For a while now...I’ve heard this...clanging sound.”

It was a distant noise that sounded both like construction and like the ringing of a bell.

“I can’t hear anything. Where’s it coming from?”

Suzu pointed. Her senses told her she was pointing toward the sky, but Adele said otherwise.

“That’s England’s first level. I think that’s the Tower of London up front.”

“Really?” asked Suzu.

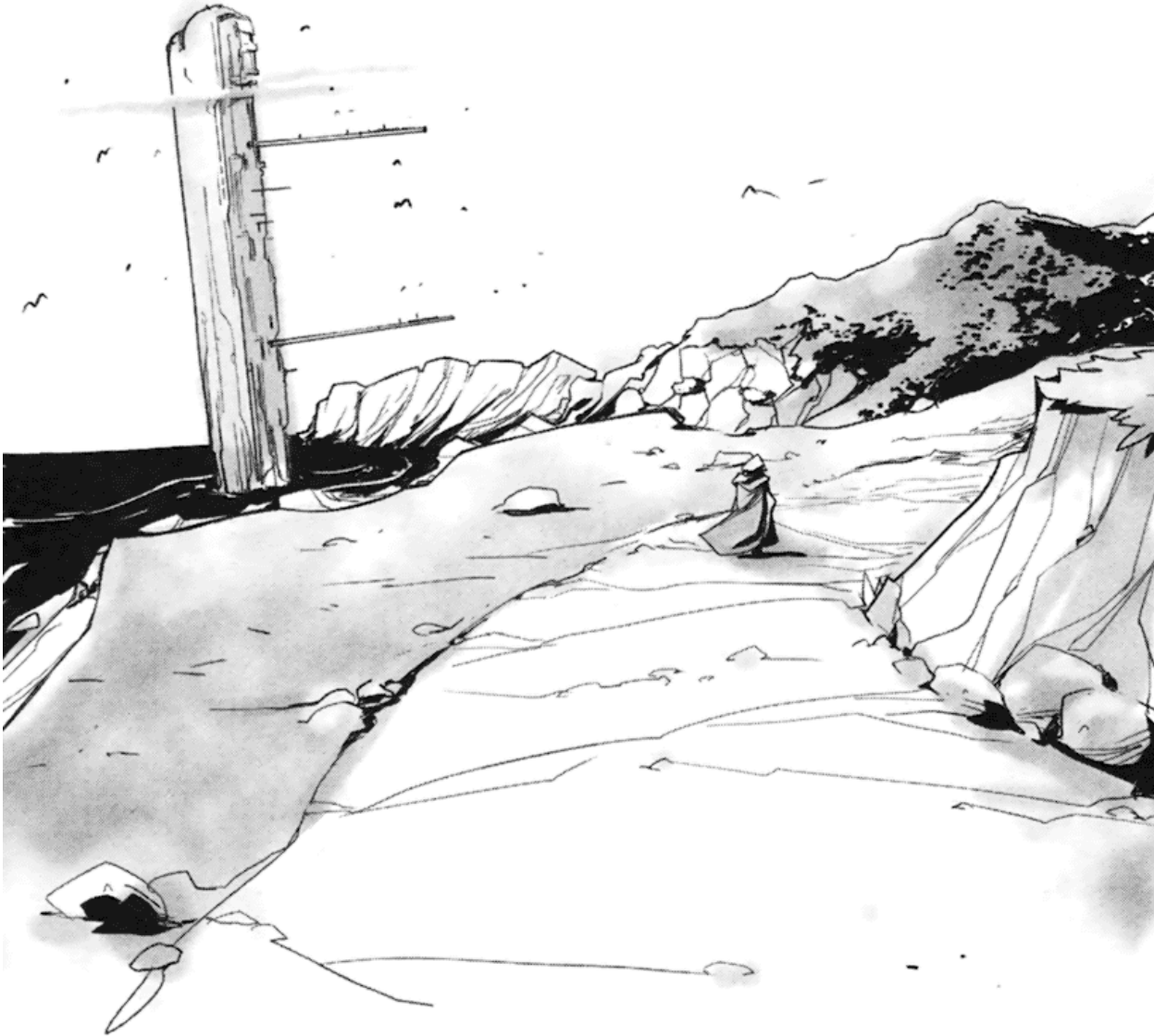
Adele nodded.

“Yes, but they perform executions there too. ...Oh, sorry. Maybe I shouldn’t have said that. What I mean is, it’s essentially a fortress even if it’s called a tower. There might be something there.” She took a breath. “If we ever get a chance to visit that level, maybe we can go find out what’s causing the noise.”

Chapter 17: Recluses around the Corner

CHAPTER 17

"Recluses around the Corner"



Is the surprise upon meeting someone
The same thing as expectation?
Point Allocation (Second Time)

Is the surprise upon meeting someone

The same thing as expectation?

Point Allocation (Second Time)

Someone walked along a hill.

It was Scarred who wore the usual hooded cloak.

He walked toward the end of the seaside path where the transport ship and diplomatic ship were. That area had become an inlet. Scarred was still a good distance away, but the two ships were clearly visible. The villagers greeted him along the way.

“Oh, Scarred. Do you want some of the fish I caught this morning? I can put it on a coral skewer.”

“The weather is nice today, so I can prepare some water for you if you want, Scarred.”

He gave simple replies and waved while continuing on. His waving hand held the metal stake connected to his ankle by a chain, but the people seemed to view that as a standard part of his greeting and waved back.

Scarred nodded, turned his back, and continued toward the inlet.

“If the graveyard can’t be fixed, it will have to be moved.”

Scarred thought about the graveyard. It was located beyond the beach which had become an inlet after the transport ship’s crash had caused the crust to sink.

...I must look after that graveyard that is made up of three hundred swords and stones.

However, the area around the crashed ship had been cut off, so that twenty square meter area on the edge of the hill had been off limits for the past two weeks. Scarred had viewed it from a distance and it seemed the break in the hill had caused a crack. Either that crack would have to be fixed or the entire graveyard would have to be relocated.

He also had to worry about the water lilies he looked after at a nearby spring.

“I wonder what happened to them.”

Scarred continued on to the hill visible from the two ships.

He saw some small figures appear from the new grass ahead.

They were brown kobolds that were only about fifteen centimeters tall.

...If the worker kobolds are out, the ley lines must not have been disturbed.

Scarred suddenly slowed his pace. The path ahead was blocked by a structure growing from the crust. It looked like a hunk of metal.

“This is from when Tres España made a quick assault a while back. That spear is one of San Mercado’s new products.”

Spears, axes, and pieces of ships were growing from the ground. There were quite a few of them. At the bottom was a piece of metal several meters across that looked like a piece of a ship’s foundation.

“The ships I sank were trapped by England’s structure, disassembled by the ley lines, circulated through them, and incorporated into the surface of the ground. I think the crew was sent to the higher levels and exchanged for an exorbitant ransom. Once I’m sure everything is safe, we can dig this up and sell it to the upper levels as scrap metal.”

As he formulated his plan, Scarred continued on.

He waved toward the kobolds and they lowered their heads. They did so in order from biggest to smallest, so it formed a sort of wave.

As they greeted him, Scarred took the book in his left hand and lightly pressed its edge against his face. Scarred then rubbed it across the scar running from the top of his nose to his left cheek.

“The day still hasn’t come that I can be proud of this scar or any new scar. I can only hope to satisfy them by supporting England with my life. But...”

Scarred looked up toward the sea to the left.

“I never expected to receive guests like these.”

He could see the transport ship and the diplomatic ship stopped next to it.

Scarred was already about to pass by where the two ships were. The rising sun was visible behind them and he could see their decks.

About an hour earlier, they seemed to have been having a class on the deck.

...I had heard the chancellor’s officers and student council were gathered here, but it looks like they form a single class.

They were no longer visible. The transferred cargo was being fixed to the deck, but that work was almost complete.

Scarred could see no motion, but he could hear noises coming from within the ship. Nails were being hammered, wood was being sawed, and occasionally a large object would cause a great impact as it was set in place.

Some sea-horses in the nearby sea were looking up curiously.

...The crew of that transport ship still can’t leave here.

That was why they were altering the interior of the ship to make it easier to live in.

Scarred thought while walking along the path which was covered with less grass than before. He thought about the ninja who had disappeared inside that ship.

...What was that about?

He thought about the fact that the ninja had stopped him. Rumor had it he was their 1st special duty officer. Someone of that level should have been able to accurately judge the power of Scarred's spell simply by viewing it.

...So why did he stop me?

Thinking about it did not help. Only that ninja himself would know the answer. And...

"I still hold the answer to those three hundred people's questions of 'why'."

Once he passed the hill, the path turned gently inland and the inlet lay ahead.

The hill to the right had a steep slope and it obstructed one's view of the path around the inlet. Scarred naturally turned toward that path which led to the graveyard.

"Eh?"

Someone was walking down that path which could not be entirely seen due to the slope to the right.

It was that ninja.

They both uttered a quiet "ah" and stopped walking.

Scarred took half a step back.

"Why?" he muttered without thinking.

The ninja frantically shook his hands back and forth.

“No, um. I can explain. Over this hill, there is a graveyard with a lot of swords set up in it. I could see it from the ship and the ground seemed damaged from the crash. I just checked on it and was about to go inform your village.”

The ninja held up a memo. It contained a simple map, directions on repairing the graveyard, and a few other options.

...*Why?*

Scarred almost asked that question which referenced many different things, but he held his tongue.

He needed to say something else before asking questions.

They had saved the children. Scarred had made a hasty conclusion and slapped him. He had protected Scarred from a fragment of the ship and been injured. There was something Scarred had to say regarding all of that.

“I must apolo-...”

But before he could finish, the ninja spoke up.

“Are the children doing well?”

“Eh?”

Scarred was at a loss for words, but it seemed the ninja was already waiting for an answer. Scarred realized he had lost his chance to apologize.

“Judge. They are doing fine. Their mother is a banshee, so having her cry could have led to further deaths.”

“Judge. Then I am even more relieved we could save them.”

“Judge,” replied Scarred again.

He was relieved to find he was speaking normally with the ninja. He was doubly relieved that the ninja showed no hostility.

“About you saving the children...”

The ninja gasped and started to say something, but Scarred asked a question before he could.

He asked something he had been thinking about for a while now.

“Why did you stop me?”

Before the ninja could cut in, Scarred added to his question.

“I have heard you are Musashi’s 1st special duty officer. Someone in that position should have been able to comprehend my spell, so why did you stop me?”

“Well, uh...” The ninja scratched at his hat and finally gave an answer. “I don’t know much about spells, so I didn’t notice you were using one.”

“What? That is completely ridiculous.”

As he rejected the ninja’s answer, Scarred had a single thought.

...Why is he denying what he did?

He had to have a reason. The spell had produced ether light, so it was unthinkable that he could not have noticed. The ninja may have looked calm, but that was obviously a hastily constructed lie.

And if he was going to lie, why would he say he had made a mistake? If he had some reason for his actions, Scarred would have accepted it.

The ninja was not blaming him or denying him. He was merely saying he was careless.

...He is essentially saying I did the right thing.

“Why are you trying to make this your failure?”

As soon as Scarred realized what he had said, he clamped his mouth shut. He looked at the ninja, but the ninja's expression was hidden by his scarf and hat.

Scarred wanted to ask so many things, but he could find no way to begin. And this time, the ninja acted first. He began with a quick nod.

"I was careless is all."

He was sticking with the idea that he had not noticed. He then began to walk past Scarred.

After a moment of hesitation, Scarred stepped aside to let him past. He watched the ninja take the first step.

...Is this really okay?

Something felt wrong. He felt something similar to guilt.

In the ninja's mind, the conversation was already over, but Scarred felt differently.

...Why?

The feeling may have been a misunderstanding, but Scarred felt as if his heart had stumbled.

Why was that ninja choosing his own failure? Scarred thought back on that question.

...Why is this ninja sacrificing himself? Willingly offering yourself up as a sacrifice is the same as-...

Scarred's thoughts were about to bring forth more words, but he was interrupted.

"Hey, Tenzou! Can't you just settle this with that gentleman in the cloak?" shouted someone on the transport ship.

...Who is that?

Scarred and the ninja turned toward the vertical transport ship. A naked boy stood on the edge of the deck with his toes turned inward. He was swinging his hips back and forth as if guiding the work.

“Tenzou! You said that graveyard needs to be fixed or moved, right? What was it you said? ‘Their souls cannot resteth in peace like this’?”

“Th-that is not how I speak! And you’re using it wrong anyway!”

Scarred did not understand what this meant, but he assumed it was some form of Far Eastern custom.

But who was that naked boy? He was standing around swinging his hips while everyone else was working, so he may have been a new type of spirit that exceeded human understanding. He appeared to have seaweed in both hands and on his crotch, but if he was a spirit indigenous to the Far East rather than a human, it made sense that Scarred had never seen anything like him. The seaweed in his hands suggested he was a type of water spirit. Scarred decided to name him Wet Man.

Meanwhile, Wet Man looked over at Scarred.

“Well, anyway, that settles that! Okay, you in the cloak! What are your plans?”

The spirit’s friendliness sped up the conversation. Scarred held up a thick book he had been carrying in his pocket.

“I intend to check the graveyard, decide whether to repair it or move it, and carry out whichever action I decide on.”

“Okay, that simplifies matters. Tenzou, you go help him.”

“What? But I was planning to help with the work on the ship.”

“Don’t be silly. With me here, what more help do they need? ...Eh? What is it, Asama? Why are you smiling with your veins bulging out? ...Everyone, stop Asama! She’s pulled out her bow!”

If that Far East shrine maiden is trying to purify him, he might be an evil spirit, concluded Scarred.

Wet Man shouted out toward them while searching for a place to hide.

“Um, well, this is an opportunity for some cultural exchange! Tenzou, you fix or move the broken graveyard with the gentleman behind you. You said the flowers by the nearby spring needed some work too, didn’t you? No one’ll notice if you swipe some tools right now, so take whatever you need.”

Scarred saw the ninja scratch at his hat as if he did not know how to respond, so Scarred spoke up behind him.

“Judge!”

The ninja turned around in surprise, but Scarred did not mind.

This was his punishment for lying and trying to run.

The ninja noticed Scarred was ignoring him and looking up into the sky, so he turned back toward the ship.

“Um... I...”

He was unable to form words of protest and he trailed off. Wet Man smiled.

“Okay, this will be some cultural exchange on the local level. Tenzou, you used your survival skills to build simple living spaces and barricades, so fixing a place like that and gathering useful plants should be a piece of cake, right? You also said you were worried about the water lilies by the spring, so go check on them too.”

So...

“That gentleman knows the land, so get his help and do what work you can. That’s your job for today.”

Scarred nodded and lightly tapped the ninja’s shoulder to say “let’s go”. As he made his way toward the inlet, he suddenly recalled something else.

That ninja had seen him crying.

What should he say about that?

...I shouldn’t apologize.

He could not find an answer and he heard the ninja walking behind him. He also heard the sound of something being fired on the ship, but he decided he had misheard because the situation was too peaceful for that.

...Peace, hm?

Scarred wanted an answer that was not a lie. He walked on the path to the graveyard while wondering how to receive that answer.

As noon approached, the color white reflected the sunlight coming from high in the sky.

The reflection came from a white domed building with the emblem of Tres España’s Alcalá de Henares. The building was labelled “Medical Division” and its outer perimeter was lined with hospital room windows. Clotheslines made of rope hung in the windows and the white sheets, towels, and clothes also reflected the sunlight.

The color red suddenly moved within all that white.

A female student was hanging laundry out to dry in a south-facing window on the building's third floor. She was short and had two false arms, one of which wore an armband reading "3rd Special Duty – Tachibana Gin".

Gin finished hanging up all the laundry in the basket by the window and let out a breath.

She turned back toward the rest of the white room and looked at the bed.

A young man slept in that bed. He was tall, had short blond hair, and his eyes were still closed. Gin moved aside from the window so he could see the sky. She circled around to the other side of the bed and looked up at the blue sky while he slept.

"When will you finally wake up, Muneshige?" she muttered. "What am I supposed to do from now on?"

Really. What am I supposed to do? thought Gin as she asked her question.

She sighed and looked down at Muneshige.

The white cloth placed over him had white crosses extending from the side and from the holes opened in it.

"Your injury is so bad even the cross-shaped medical Testamento Firma heavy charms do not last long."

The crosses which were sticking into his body like stakes were made from combining charms with metal or wooden panels with spells written on them. They were hard, additional functionality could be added through their sockets, and they could be used continuously so long as ether fuel was supplied. The same type of system was used in Gin's false arms, her Arcabuz Cruz, and other devices like gods of wars. The medical ones being used here primarily substituted for and strengthened the circulatory system, metabolism, and digestive system. It would

purify and regulate the blood, efficiently circulate the digested materials, and eliminate waste.

The additional charm attached atop the cross driven into the base of his right leg was turning black.

Gin pulled a replacement charm from the hygienic wooden box on the bedside table. All she could do was remove the old charm, throw it away, and attach the replacement.

“My happiness to have something to do may show just how helpless I feel.”

After finishing the replacement, Gin checked the other heavy charms, but none of them needed replacement. With nothing left to do, she opened her mouth to speak.

...Come to think of it, I actually have something to say.

She had spoken about the attack on Musashi countless times over the past two weeks, but there was also plenty to say about her daily life.

“This morning, the Nappa cabbage at the market was at a good price.”

According to the health committee, four months would be needed to fully heal Muneshige’s legs. His right leg was especially bad after kicking off the air twice.

...They said he might never walk normally again. If that happens...

He would lose the inherited name of Tachibana Muneshige. The inherited name of the postman Garcia could also be lost if he could not walk.

He was being kept asleep to help him recover and that would apparently continue for another two weeks.

What would his position be once he opened his eyes? Or hers for that matter?

But once he could move again, he could make some kind of decision no matter how insecure his position was. That was why Gin had decided to hope for him to wake up but to not reject him.

The health committee had decided to wait until he woke up on his own rather than trying to force the issue.

“And until then I am supposed to speak to him to give him some kind of relief.”

He was being healed. His body was recovering and he was able to dream, so she took the time to call out to him and speak to him so he could wake up at any time.

...They told me to make sure he had some connection with the outside world.

She wanted the same thing, so she told him so many things.

She did not actually like speaking and was not very good at it. She did not know how her father had felt about it, but he had not taught her how to make daily conversation or how to laugh. He had instead taught her how to use a weapon and how to fight.

For the history recreation, Tachibana Gin had to have the skill necessary for her father, Dousetsu, to accept her as his heir despite being a woman.

She had trained to fulfill that role. Her father must have had incredible resolve to fulfill the history recreation with his small daughter who never seemed to grow any taller or more muscular.

In the end, she had earned the inherited name.

“But now I am a girl who does not know how to speak with people.”

Her everyday life had been focused on training and maintaining her strength. If she had not done so, she could have lost her inherited name. At first, she had been afraid to lose the protection of her father.

...And later, I was afraid to lose that identity because it was all I had.

As a result, she knew nothing else. She did not know what it was like to play with, speak with, express herself to, or head out with girls her own age. She had needed to recreate history, so it had been crucial that she maintained the strength that her father, the Peerless in the West, expected of her as Tachibana Gin.

And so...

“I wonder if he understands what I say to him?”

She was only giving him reports, so she was not entirely confident that she was actually *speaking to him*.

When she thought back, she realized he had spoken a lot. He had said so many things to her.

...At first, I found it annoying to have him tell me about other people.

But she now realized that she had gotten quite used to it.

He had spoken when they woke up in the morning.

He had spoken when they ate meals.

He had spoken at school.

He had spoken on their way home.

He had spoken as they shopped.

He had spoken as the whole family sat together.

He had spoken as they bathed.

He had spoken as they went to bed at night.

At some point, she had started to forget how important any one aspect was.

“Is this what people call everyday life?”

Suddenly, Gin noticed the facial hair on his cheeks was getting a bit long.

“...”

Tachibana Gin understood that she was a perfectionist. Otherwise, she could never have lived a normal life using those giant false arms. Also, combat required both speed and accuracy.

...When did I shave him last?

Three days ago. That meant it was about time to shave him again. She pulled a cloth, a razor, and a stick of soap from the bedside table's drawer. Her preparations were complete.

“Testament.”

However, shaving was quite difficult. The size of her false arms was of course an issue, but there was a bigger problem: her perfectionism meant the razor was perfectly sharpened. The slightest mistake would cause a fatal cut.

But there was nothing to be worried about. That same perfectionism meant she could operate her false arms perfectly. Using that thought to give herself confidence, she held the blade toward him and prepared to shave.

She brought the blade down toward Muneshige's neck.

“...”

But he suddenly stirred.

“...!?”

Gin frantically drew back the blade because his unexpected action had brought his carotid artery toward it.

He continued breathing calmly and stopped moving, but she was sweating and breathing heavily.

...Wh-what a frightening person!

She brought the hands of her false arms to her cheeks.

“Even while unconscious, you make my heart race.”

She had read in a book that one’s heart racing at someone’s casual actions was a sign of lovesickness.

She had just received that exact symptom here. Plus, he was asleep, which far exceeded the level of “casual”.

...Taking that into account, this must be great love or even extreme love. This lovesickness is on the level of the plague!

Gin regulated her breathing, prepared the razor again, and brought it toward Muneshige’s neck once more.

“ ... ”

For a second time, he stirred a bit and brought sticky sweat to her brow. She realized she had lost her chance to attack due to being lost in love and she felt all the more embarrassed.

“I was careless!”

Love is not needed here. I am shaving his beard, she thought. But he does seem full of openings today.

This had happened before. Before the attack on Musashi, she had decided to give him an especially close shave as she would not return for a while. He had moved a surprising amount that time.

...I held his chin in place with my left arm, but the Valdés siblings arrived and stopped me.

The first time she had tried it, she had decided to attempt it head on. A health committee member had stopped her once she mounted him. The razor in her hand had apparently led the boy to think she was trying to kill Muneshige. She was still not sure how someone could make such an extreme misunderstanding about a scene from everyday married life.

However, she had to learn from her mistakes and better herself. Also, finding an efficient method was the duty of a good wife.

“Today I will experiment with a two-bladed approach for improved efficiency.”

For some reason, Muneshige seemed to grimace and tilt his head away, but she decided she was imagining it. While holding a razor in each false arm, she leaned over him.

“Here I go.”

She held up the razors.

“D-do not make a rash decision, Tachibana!” cried a sudden voice behind her.

Someone tried to restrain her, but ended up pushing her and knocking her off balance.

“Ah.”

The two razors forcefully stabbed forward.

Gin looked forward.

Muneshige’s face contained a look similar to resignation. The razors had stabbed to the right of his neck and above his left ear. They were stabbed into the bed, but their blades were less than a millimeter from his skin.

...I have to say, my aim was perfect.

Gin pulled out the razors and turned around. There she found...

“Felipe...Segundo? That is to say...chancellor?”

“The short, late middle-aged man looked up and backed away when he heard his name. He did not bother to fix his worn-out uniform and shirt and he grabbed the bucket and mop he had brought to the door.

“Um, well... Do you mind if I clean in here?”

“I can handle that, chancellor.”

...This is the same as ever.

After holing up in his room to complete his work running Tres España, the chancellor would clean the academy's buildings and grounds with an apologetic look on his face. When he went out to the city, he would speak with the people while acting like a normal citizen.

Gin wondered if it was hard doing all that, but there was something else she wondered even more.

...Does he have no time for himself?

She had once never had any time for her own life. She had never left her father's mansion and she had spent all of her time on training.

...But the chancellor spends all his time on others. And if you try to tell him that, he merely smiles as if he has no other choice.

His expression told one he did not want time for himself and that this was his only option.

Gin did not like delving into other people's business. Just as she was skilled at certain things, her experience had told her everyone had a place they fit best. That was why she did not say anything more about the chancellor.

“Testament,” she said instead. “This room was left to me, so you can continue on to the next room.”

Or...

“Or do you think it is inappropriate for me to remain here with Muneshige now that his inherited name will be removed?”

“No, I do not think that,” said Segundo with a shake of the head. His voice was surprisingly clear. “I do not think it is ever wrong for someone to want to be with someone.”

“Even if they are a stalker?”

When she saw Segundo lower his head in thought, Gin admonished herself for speaking without thinking. She had a bad habit of seeking a perfect answer like that.

“Was the one who decided to remove his inherited name-...”

“Testament. Juana made that decision. I believe she had a few different reasons, but one of them was definitely Tres España’s finances.”

“If the title of Peerless in the West is damaged, will fewer people invest in Tres España?”

“Testament. Even in our own country, people will stop investing in wartime goods and weapons. After all, the reputation of the Peerless of the West is related to the trust people have in brands like San Mercado.”

“Then you hope giving someone else the name will hold on to that trust and the clients it brings?”

“Testament.” Segundo nodded, pressed the mop against the edge of the bucket, and wrung it with his foot. “It will also create a good opportunity for San Mercado and the other domestic brands to renovate their weaponry. Redoing the overall design can help with PR and meet the demand for domestic manual labor

jobs. Most importantly, it is a good opportunity to redevelop the weapons which have become overly focused on gunfights due to our conflicts with P.A.ODA over the past few years. We can cheaply sell the old weapons in emerging nations and the New World.” He took a breath. “And the people who are stuck in the way of the old wars can renew themselves as well.”

That comment caused Gin to gulp.

...This man really is the chancellor.

She knew that was an insulting thing to think, but she had to ask about it.

“If you are thinking about all this, why do also do the routine jobs like cleaning? If you took the lead and instructed Lady Juana to carry out the ideas you just mentioned, she would...” Gin hesitated but decided to go through with it. “She would not look down on you so much.”

“You are overestimating me. Also... I have to follow the Testament descriptions and support our decline.”

Segundo gave a resigned smile.

“Everything I just said is common knowledge in the newspapers and the divine network. Also, there is something else Juana and the others know about...”

“Yes?”

“The next inheritor of the title of Peerless in the West will not be from Tres España.”

Gin froze in place for a moment, but finally spoke.

“Testament. In other words, the Tachibana family will move. According to the Testament descriptions, Tachibana Muneshige leaves the Ootomo clan and begins serving the Toyotomi clan which is now known as Hashiba.”

Gin saw the man standing before her nod.

“The general consensus is that Hashiba will still be willing to pay a fair amount for the title of Peerless in the West.”

“Testament. I understand,” said Gin. She had her own understanding of what it meant for Muneshige to lose his inherited name. “When P.A.ODA or Hashiba from M.H.R.R. arrive, we could have stood up to them under the flag of the Peerless in the West or negotiated the transfer of that name.”

But...

“But Muneshige lost and the value of that name has dropped. Hashiba no longer desires it so badly. So instead of opposing them with the next inheritor of the name, we can show our friendship with Hashiba by selling them that Urban Name.”

“Testament. If we do not choose the next inheritor, we will show we do not wish to oppose Hashiba, M.H.R.R., or P.A.ODA. They will owe us a favor and they will be unable to attack us or oppose us as easily. The stability and expectation that brings will stimulate investments in the non-wartime side of the economy. We have focused on war and the New World for so long that our mainland has been hollowed out, so bringing investments to our internal economy is exactly what we need.”

Segundo paused for a second and sighed.

“Sorry. I know this is not how you want things to go.”

“Testament. Hearing that is enough,” said Gin. “By the way, have you discussed all of this with Lady Juana?”

“She can handle it all without being told anything.”

“Testament. But I think it would make a difference if she knew her superior thought the same things and made the same conclusions.”

She was going to add “and she might not look down on you so much”, but he cut in.

“I don’t like ordering people around.” He gave the same resigned smile as before. “I just have no confidence after I failed so severely in the past.”

“Would you mind telling me about it?”

“I’m not sure.” Segundo placed the mop on the floor, squeezed the handle, and lowered his forehead onto his hands. “You know the vice chancellor and 2nd special duty officer, Takakane and Fusae? That ghost duo died due to certain circumstances, but they remain with us because they held certain regrets toward each other.”

“Testament. I heard they both died during the double reproduction of the Battle of Lepanto and the Battle of Itsukushima. From what I hear, many people with inherited names were lost during that fierce battle.”

“Testament. That’s right. It happened before you were born, didn’t it? That set Tres Portugal down the path to a union with Tres España, but those two are still supporting Tres España as ghosts. And...” Segundo scratched at his head. “If you died, would you still stay with him?”

Gin looked down at Muneshige.

...*Well...*

She had a sudden thought about what Segundo had said. He had not asked if she thought Muneshige would stay with her if he died. That had likely been out of consideration to the fact that she was looking after him as he recovered. Gin decided to respond to his consideration.

“Testament.”

She answered in the affirmative and Segundo looked up.

“That is a good thing.”

He gave a slight smile and Gin was able to guess something from that smile.

...Could it be?

“Was that not the case for you, chancellor?”

Gin’s father had once told her that many sacrifices had been made during the Battle of Lepanto and Itsukushima.

During the battle, Tres Portugal and Tres España’s militaries had wanted to create a formation to the east. To do so, they had built a city on the coast of the inland sea and had their families live there.

But that city had been targeted.

...A lot of people lost their families.

That had accelerated the spread of people who insisted on pure blood and wished to abolish all immigration.

“It’s hard to say.” Segundo gave another resigned smile, turned his back, and placed the bucket in the hallway. “You take care of this room. I’ll start out here. ...Oh, and don’t bother telling me if you are going anywhere.”

He turned back as he walked out into the hallway.

“I think the time is coming when you will have to make some kind of decision. But no matter what Juana says, try not to hold a grudge. This is all because I haven’t done a proper job.”

“Testament. Do not worry. I am not ignorant of Tres España’s current state. ...But if I were to accomplish something before long, would it be possible to restore Muneshige’s inherited name?”

“He would end up going to Hashiba. Are you sure you want that?”

“Testament. As long as I am with him, nothing else matters.”

Gin faced the chancellor’s back as he began mopping the hallway and she spoke a truth of her own to match the truth he had told her.

“After all, he is the one who cut off my arms and gave me an everyday life in their place.”

Study:

●Map of England●



Sis! Sis! We've made it to England, but what does it look like!? All this confusing stuff about blocks and levels has me really excited, so could you tell me!?



Heh heh heh. Excitable brother, listen to your sister's explanation and feel the excitement fade away. This is more or less what England looks like.



The entire kingdom is four territories and the representative one is England. And while England is in charge, the other territories currently oppose them. The different colors represent the four levels with the darkest being the fourth level and the lightest being the first level. Each level is not a pure slab. Amid the color divisions, the layers overlap and split apart. Also, a shallow ocean surrounds the fourth level, so the gaps seen here are actually almost impossible to see.



Nwooooh! It's all so confusing I can feel the excitement fading away, away, away!



Could you try to lose interest more quietly?

Map of England

Toori: Nee-chan! Nee-chan! We've made it to England, but what does it look like!? All this confusing stuff about blocks and levels has me really excited, so could you tell me!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Excitable brother, listen to your sister's explanation and feel the excitement fade away. This is more or less what England looks like.

Top right: Scotland

Top left: Ireland

Middle left: Wales

Bottom left: England

Upper right: Oxford Academy

Middle right: London (Anglia)

Lower right: River Thames

Bottom: Musashi

Kimi: The entire kingdom is four territories and the representative one is England. And while England is in charge, the other territories currently oppose them. The different colors represent the four levels with the darkest being the fourth level and the lightest being the first level. Each level is not a pure slab. Amid the color divisions, the layers overlap and split apart. Also, a shallow ocean surrounds the fourth level, so the gaps seen here are actually almost impossible to see.

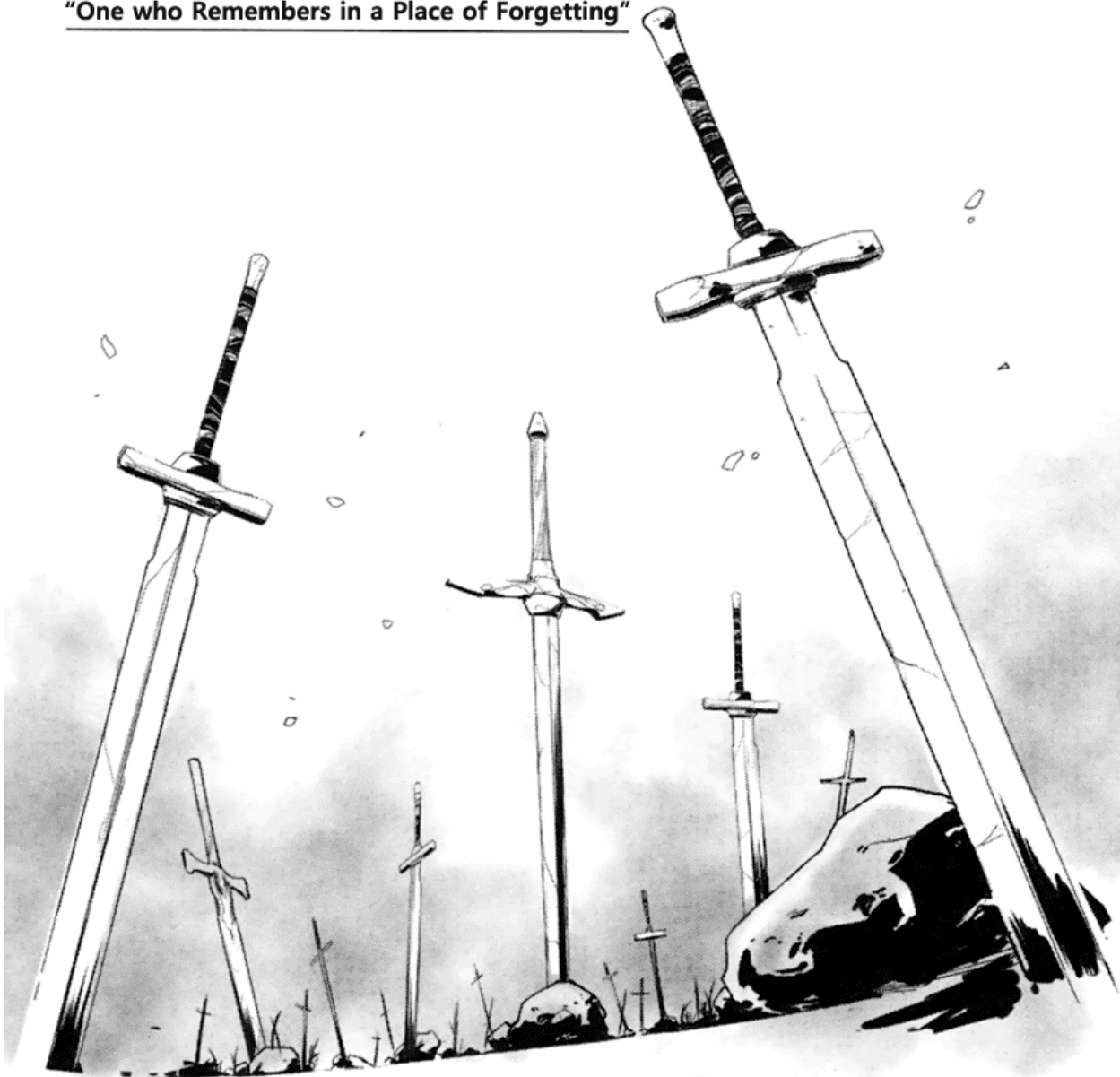
Toori: Nwooooh! It's all so confusing I can feel the excitement fading away, away, away!

Kimi: Could you try to lose interest more quietly?

Chapter 18: One who Remembers in a Place of Forgetting

CHAPTER 18

"One who Remembers in a Place of Forgetting"



When there is a place that should be remembered
Why do people keep it in their hearts?

Point Allocation (Regret)

When there is a place that should be remembered

Why do people keep it in their hearts?

Point Allocation (Regret)

A graveyard bordered the inlet. Stones were placed on the ground and swords stood up like gravestones. There was a single stone for each sword.

“So there are three hundred of each,” muttered Tenzou as he worked on pulling out the swords with some help from the kobolds.

He was removing the swords and stones about halfway through the graveyard near where the crack had formed at the beginning of a slope.

He looked around and spotted a spring further back.

The spring was undamaged and water lily buds floated in it, but the graves in front of it were in trouble. The ground had crumbled as it was swallowed up by the crack in the hill.

...We came here to move these graves, but...

The kobolds that had appeared from the crack were carrying the swords and stones out to the path where they piled them up together. Scarred waited on the path where he would attach labels to the swords and stones to indicate a pair.

Tenzou took them from the ground, the kobolds carried them, and Scarred gathered them.

However, they were not working silently. The kobolds spoke the most. Kobolds were partially employable fairies that would carry out hard labor. They lived in the ley lines running through ore deposits in the ground. If one wanted to employ them, one had to form a contract promising to give them “something of value”.

“Where does this go?” asked one of the kobolds with a heavy accent.

Kobolds were individuals without a shared consciousness like that of the brown algae creatures. When they had come from the ley line, Tenzou had asked them to work, but the ones who had finished their work were asking what to do next.

When they had nothing to do, some of them would begin staring off into the sea or sky, so it was necessary to call out to them and give new instructions. This led to a lot of back and forth, but another aspect of it caught Tenzou's focus.

...It makes my heart race to give others instructions.

“Hurry up and give more work.”

About thirty kobolds had appeared, but about five of them had nothing to do at any one time. Tenzou had to give them instructions, so he placed a hand on the sword he had just pulled out.

“Take this over there.”

He would instruct the kobolds to carry the items to Scarred, but they would sometimes go too far or stop before reaching the man. He would need to give another instruction or have Scarred do it.

...Am I giving the instructions wrong?

The kobolds often had nothing to do and the work was not progressing smoothly. It sounded nice if he said he had room for waste, but he still did not like it. Also...

...Huh? Come to think of it, how much small change do I have on me today?

There were about thirty kobolds. He had made a contract with them, so he would need to give them thirty “objects of value”. Tenzou tried to remember how much small change he had in his wallet.

...If I run out of small change, will I have to give them more valuable coins!?

Kobolds did not give change for larger denominations, so he would have to give them silver and gold coins if he ran out of less valuable coins. He could also try

to give them other valuable possessions, but he was unsure how well that would work.

“E-excuse me. Hypothetically speaking, would this cokepen be sufficient for payment?”

Two kobolds holding a single stone together looked up at the cokepen Tenzou held up.

“Don’t take kobolds lightly.”

“What happens if I do that?”

The instant Tenzou asked, the two kobolds launched the fist-sized stone at his crotch.

It was a direct hit.

With a dull noise, the stone sank into his crotch and slowly fell down.

“Fnh!”

Tenzou let out a dull gasp and fell to his knees. The two kobolds caught the falling stone.

“That happens.”

...I shouldn’t have asked. I should have known a hypothetical question wouldn’t work with half employable spirits. Ha ha ha. What a simple mistake...

“Why are you crouching down?”

Hearing Scarred’s voice, Tenzou tried to stand, but he focused on regulating his breathing so he could actually stand up straight. He thanked god that the scene had been hidden by the many swords.

“Judge. U-um, I came across a hard stone to get up.”

“Judge. I see.”

Scarred nodded and Tenzou heard him take a small breath. It sounded like he was preparing to say something.

“ ... ”

But Scarred remained silent.

...I need to say something to urge him to speak. After all, it was because we crashed here that the graveyard was damaged.

“Did you notice some kind of problem?” he asked.

“Eh? Oh.”

Scarred seemed to hesitate and reached for the thick book sitting next to him.

...That is a dictionary of the Far Eastern language.

A shallow translation spell circulated throughout the entire Far East via the ley lines. Each area’s guardian deity for travelers oversaw it, but its effects were very weak in England because it was not a part of the Far East’s land.

...And some people are not used to using our language.

As Tenzou thought, Scarred completed his preparations. He remained seated on the grass next to the path.

“You seem inexperienced in giving instructions to kobolds.”

“Inexperienced?”

Tenzou tilted his head.

...Should I have more directly called them over, said what I wanted, and given a time limit?

But Scarred spoke to two kobolds carrying a sword.

“Form a line there.”

“Understood.”

One of the two kobolds raised its arms next to Scarred and the other stopped a short distance away.

“This is the front of the line.”

“This is the end of the line.”

The other kobolds began moving toward the “front of the line”. Once a line started to form, the “end of the line” guided the others in. The line grew quite long.

“Kobolds can only be given simple instructions, but more complex jobs can be constructed by having them work together with different simple tasks. You need a fair number of them to do that, but thirty should be enough for this.”

Scarred then picked up a sword and spoke to each kobold in turn.

“Please carry the swords from there to here. Please use a cloth to wipe off the swords placed here. Please carry the cleaned swords to that line over there.”

As she gave them each a job, Tenzou thought about how this was different from the instructions he had given.

“You created a sequence so the kobolds could each focus on a single simple task, didn’t you?”

“Judge. That’s right. Instead of telling them what I want now, I gave them a portion of the overall job to look after. If you create a gathering spot and form a cycle of work, they will not forget what their job is and will always have

something to do. You do not give an entire job to a kobold; you give it a portion of the whole.”

“I see,” said Tenzou as he started to stand up.

...That turns my idea on its head.

They were being given a single instruction, but they all formed a larger job when combined.

It was important to divide the work, create a cycle, and manage the instructions.

Tenzou had done something similar with his classmates during their two weeks on the transport ship.

...But that was because I knew what areas they specialized in.

Their combat styles, qualifications, and body types were enough to tell him what they could do, so they would act on their own if he gave them a job.

But the kobolds all looked the same. Having to think about what to have them do depending on the situation made instructing them a lot harder.

...No.

Tenzou realized his thoughts contained a slight mistake. The students he had instructed on the transport ship had been the type whose specialty was obvious at a glance.

...But most students are not like that.

The transport ship had been filled with those who were on the front lines.

On the other hand, most students were more like the kobolds. They were the type who should be given jobs anyone could do but were needed to complete the work.

“I see,” said Tenzou as he thought and looked down at the kobolds.

...I have a lot to learn.

“It looks like I was taking you lightly.”

“You angered us.”

They launched a second rock.

With a sound of impact, Tenzou’s legs gave out and he fell to his knees. He hung his head down and silently began slapping his hand against his right thigh. Having finished giving instructions, Scarred turned toward him.

“What is it?”

“It is nothing,” replied a kobold.

“If you say so.”

...Huh? Am I being toyed with by these kobolds?

Even so, Tenzou preferred this to additional questions from Scarred.

The kobolds had already grabbed another stone, but Tenzou understood a third attack would not come if he gave them instructions. He decided to automate the work on his side of things as much as possible.

“Form a line over there, if you don’t mind.”

“Understood, if you don’t mind.”

“This is the front of the line, if you don’t mind.”

“This is the end of the line, if you don’t mind.”

...Ah, that kind of pisses me off.

Just as he began to pull out another sword, he heard quiet laughter. He turned around to find Scarred sitting down while twisted around so his back was to Tenzou. Scarred's shoulders were shaking.

Tenzou was unsure if he should be glad he had made him laugh.

But then Scarred cleared his throat.

“Anyway, I will pay for their contracts, so do not worry. You helped me look after the water lilies, so I have to pay you back somehow. You even fixed the drain, didn't you?”

There is a god, thought Tenzou.

His classmates would never do that, and even if they did, it would come with usury-level interest such as 30% a day.

As Tenzou silently revered Scarred, Scarred called out to him.

“You do an amazing job of pulling out those swords.”

Tenzou had been pulling the swords from the ground.

As he watched, Scarred held up one of the swords he had pulled out and he stared at it with an impressed look. The blade was treated with ether so it would not rust and it was not chipped or bent.

“I tried it before, but the ground was too hard to pull it out. Even spirit spells are difficult to use when the problem is the ground being too hard. It is strange you are pulling them out so easily. Are you using some kind of ninja technique?”

“I see,” said Tenzou with a nod.

He had been pulling out the swords and dislodging the stones because Scarred had been unable to do so.

And Scarred's problem was the ground being too hard.

...But this is more about knowing the trick than using a ninja technique.

"This land here was levelled before the graveyard was built, wasn't it?"

"Judge. It was, but why does that matter?"

"Judge," replied Tenzou as he tapped on the hardened surface of the ground with a finger. "Levelled land has a hard surface, but it is loose underneath. The wind and rain hit the ground, but the frost and the heat of the sun remove the air and moisture from the dirt. That is what causes it to harden. It is the same as how an unplowed field grows hard. And as the ground hardened, it tightened around the swords. Because the ground's density has increased, twisting or shaking the sword when pulling it out will bend the sword."

"Then how do you do it?"

"You stab it straight in."

"Eh?"

As Scarred watched, Tenzou gave a demonstration. He placed his palm on the bottom of the sword's hilt and leaned his upper body on it to push it down. The sword only seemed to move ever so slightly.

"The sword will stab further in more easily than it will pull out. And because the ground has hardened, it will not contract and tighten around the sword again."

He pushed the sword in to widen the hole.

"If you stab it straight in and pull it out, it comes out without catching."

When he pulled it out, Scarred gasped.

"..."

Scarred's amazement made Tenzou feel a little better.

...This is a very different reaction from my classmates.

He could almost hear those horrible people's reactions:

“Oh? You're a genius sword remover, Tenzou! You can make a living with that!!”

“Oh, my. So you can handle it all on your own, Tenzou?”

“You are quite an admirable ninja for bothering with something that will not earn any money. You are still on the losing end, though.”

“Shiro-kun, aren't you being a little too honest there?”

...That last one was directed at one of their own, but is there really that much difference?

At any rate, Tenzou handed the sword to the kobolds.

...If I “took them lightly” right now, would I be killed instantly from a stab wound?

Scarred sat back down and spoke.

“You might be able to pull out Ex. Caliburn.”

“Not a chance. Based on the rumors I have heard, it is probably sealed with a spell or something. And even Lady Mary was unable to pull it out and she is a member of the royal family, isn't she?”

“Of course she could not pull it out,” said Scarred. “Double Bloody Mary is a failure of a royal.”

“A failure?” asked Tenzou.

Information from locals was often more valuable than what one learned in classes. As locals, personal opinions influenced the information more strongly, but that held meaning as well. And so Tenzou wanted to learn what Scarred meant.

“Why do you call Lady Mary a failure?”

“Judge.” Scarred nodded and held up the sword in his hand. “During Mary’s trial for the alleged attempted assassination of Queen Elizabeth, she was given a chance to pull out Ex. Caliburn to prove her innocence, but she was unable to do so.”

“Does that mean she was not suited to being queen?”

“Judge. Mary is Elizabeth’s half-sister, but the Testament descriptions made it clear she would be criticized by the people. For that reason, the identity of the person who inherited her name was never revealed. She would come and go between the Tower of London and other castles and is currently imprisoned in the northwest tower of the Tower of London. However, only those connected via the history recreation are allowed to see her. It seems she has been showing herself from the tower window recently.” Scarred grabbed at his hood and hid the scar on his face. “But even that is from behind a bamboo blind. That sinful woman will be executed without anyone knowing who she was. That may be what England calls mercy.”

Scarred paused before continuing.

“Of course, it is not just Mary who could not remove Ex. Caliburn. No one has been able to. Chancellor Henry VIII bragged about being able to, but it seems he never actually touched it. There was a time when it was said Ex. Caliburn might be willing to trust the one who inherited the names of two queens: Mary Tudor and Mary Stuart. In an interpretation of history, her Mary Tudor side was married on paper to Felipe II of Tres España. In the same way, her Mary Stuart side was married to the crown prince of Hexagone Française and to two Scottish nobles. That is a total of four marriages. If Excalibur chose its master based on political power, she would have been a suitable candidate.”

“You do not often hear about someone marrying four times.”

“She had her reasons,” commented Scarred with a bitter smile. “Each of the countries she married into needed those marriages to continue their histories, so England took control of and simplified the marriages so they could use them as political bargaining chips. As Mary Stuart, she became the queen of Scotland, but her role of causing political problems meant she quickly fled to England. And there she ended up half-imprisoned.”

“According to the Testament descriptions, she was charged with attempting to assassinate Queen Elizabeth, correct?”

“Judge.” Scarred lowered the sword and handed it to a kobold. “That’s right. As a Catholic, her execution acts as a trigger to begin the armada battle with Tres España, so England can only curse her name right now.”

“I see,” muttered Tenzou. He folded his arms and spoke his mind. “It’s a tricky issue.”

Scarred tilted his head at Tenzou’s comment.

“Tricky? What do you mean?”

Tenzou was unsure what to say, so he tried to back out.

“No, an outsider like me should not be speaking about your country’s problems.”

“Just tell me.”

Scarred’s somewhat forceful tone caused Tenzou to sigh. While wondering if he should really be saying this, he sat down and faced Scarred over the pile of swords. Scarred adjusted his position.

“I promise I will not get mad no matter what you say. I was the one who asked you to speak.”

“Judge,” replied Tenzou as he glanced over at the kobolds waiting their turn nearby. “I did a bit of research into this Double Bloody Mary. For example, that Urban Name comes from when the Mary of the previous generation ruled England. Her father, Chancellor Henry VIII, began the Anglican Church, but she executed a large number of its members to bring England back to Catholicism. Also, the second Mary wrote a will saying England would be transferred to Felipe II.”

“Are you saying Mary hated how England was leaving Catholicism?”

“No, that is not my point.”

After realizing how forcefully he stated that, Tenzou waved his arms back and forth.

“This is only conjecture on my part, but I think I know what Lady Mary was trying to say concerning the changes to her kingdom and to the world.” Tenzou took a breath. “She wanted to know why things could not stay as they were.”

“ ... ”

Tenzou did his best to convince himself Scarred’s silence was meaningless. Meanwhile, he realized he knew an idiot who had tried to regain something important to him.

What was the difference between that idiot who was trying to conquer the world to regain Horizon’s emotions and this woman who had bloodied herself to return England to what it once was?

Tenzou knew little of politics, so he did not know the answer. But there was one thing he did know.

...That’s right.

A certain phrase entered Tenzou’s mind. No matter how much of the future was known and no matter how little he understood of what she had needed to do and what the result meant, there was one thing he had to say.

“It must be tough.”

Tenzou realized how poor an explanation his statement was.

It was less of a thought and more of an idle statement.

That may have been why Scarred stared at him and asked about it.

“It must be tough? Why? The way she is living her life is necessary for England. With the history recreation, someone had to play Mary’s part and she must be executed. In a way, staying true to history is an absolute form of justice. How can you say doing that is tough?”

“Because it is tough.” Tenzou could not think of anything better to say. “Even if she is staying true to history, that life is nothing but negatives. The real Lady Mary who lived before the Age of the Gods fought back with the hope of possibly winning, but Double Bloody Mary of the history recreation knows she will lose but plays the role anyway. She carried out the purge of Protestants, the many marriages, and the political chaos while knowing what it would all lead to. And on top of that, she had to be prepared to take responsibility for it all in a later generation as well. She brought all these negative things on herself, so I cannot think of any way of describing it except for ‘tough’.”

“Then,” began Scarred. “Why do you think she did something so foolish?”

“Perhaps because someone else would have to do it if she did not.”

That may just be wishful thinking, thought Tenzou. This is a world of political bargaining, secret deals, and distrust, so I may be hoping for too much of her.

“Her position may be a negative one, but taking that role means no one else must face those negative aspects. Even if it is tough, that allows her to take personal pride in it and be satisfied. It may be a small thing to her, but it gives her great pride and happiness. The trick to hard work is to view the negative aspects as virtues, but even if you know that, it can still be difficult and painful.”

So...

“I just hope she has someone she can share that small happiness with.”

Tenzou noticed Scarred had fallen silent.

The man lowered his head a bit and did not move, so Tenzou’s instincts told him what must have happened.

...O-oh, no! I said too much and made him mad, didn't I!?

He had heard Double Bloody Mary was viewed as the symbol of England’s infidelity.

He did not know if that was due to the history recreation or if that was actually how people viewed her, but Double Bloody Mary was an enemy of the popular Fairy Queen and she had to be executed for the country’s prosperity even if that would cause the armada battle.

...How am I supposed to defend what I said? I started making my argument as if I knew what I was talking about.

With this and the previous misunderstanding, Tenzou felt as if he was causing nothing but anger in Scarred.

He had to say something to smooth things over, so he frantically spoke up.

“U-um, I said too much!”

“You’d better be sorry,” said a kobold.

A third rock struck Tenzou in the crotch while he sat cross-legged on the ground, so he collapsed forward.

...Wait. Isn't this a false accusation? Or have they just sped up the process?

At any rate, he let out a groan and lowered down.

“What is it?” asked Scarred.

“N-nothing?”

He accidentally made it a question because he doubted Scarred would believe him this time. He then heard Scarred stand up on the other side of the pile of swords.

“Are you injured?”

“He is not,” replied the kobold.

...I may not be injured, but I'm hurt! I'm definitely hurting!

But if he did not recover quickly, Scarred would see how pathetic he was.

...If this was Horizon and Toori-dono, they would turn it into some kind of twisted questioning game. I can almost hear them: “Oh, my. What is it? Answer me using a seasonal flower in a simile.” “U-umm, I feel like a red Gerbera bud has-...”

But he found it difficult to recover after a third strike. After all, three deaths was a game over. He had to press the start button to continue.

...But wherefore is a man's start button!

As Tenzou panicked and misused an archaic word, Scarred stood up.

“What is it?”

Scarred was a bit uneasy.

...Did I frighten him somehow?

This was not the first time that ninja had thought Scarred was angry and drawn back, but Scarred was not angry this time. He had been thinking about what the ninja had said, but it seemed that silence had put the ninja on guard.

...Oops.

He could sense the ninja drawing away.

...And he isn't even making an excuse. He's acting like he was completely in the wrong.

Which meant...

...He's taking the loss onto himself again.

He had done that before and another misunderstanding was about to make it happen again, so Scarred walked toward him.

...I still haven't spoken with him properly.

When the transport ship had crashed, Scarred had made a hasty conclusion and slapped him. He had given in to his emotions and assumed the ninja was wrong. He wanted to apologize again for that and to ask why the ninja had stopped him. If possible, he wanted them to be on equal footing when they spoke.

“What is it?”

The ninja was cautious and backing away.

...He isn't going to leave, is he?

As that thought flitted through his mind, Scarred walked over with his book under his left arm. The kobolds opened up a space for him to walk carefully to the other side of the swords.

“Ah! Watch out!”

The ninja's voice surprised him and he suddenly realized his footing had grown unsteady.

A sword had been pulled out of and a stone ripped up from the ground under his right foot, so there was a hole and a depression.

Scarred foot entered the depression and his toes caught into the hole.

“Ah.”

And he fell forward.

Tenzou did not take action simply because Scarred was falling.

Scarred's face was falling toward the hilt of a sword sticking into the ground. He thought Scarred could probably avoid it, but the vertical blade could still easily cut into his right side or shoulder.

And so Tenzou took action.

“...!”

Rather than standing up, he instantly decided to raise his hips and slide his legs forward to throw himself between Scarred and the ground. While holding Scarred, he made a half roll away from the sword.

He was now lying protectively over Scarred in the passageway created by removed swords and stones.

The primary duty of a ninja was to protect important people, so this type of action came naturally to him and Scarred was likely completely unhurt.

...*Good.*

Tenzou took a breath and rose up slightly. He supported himself on his hands and knees with Scarred beneath him. Ensuring the safety of their surroundings came

first. He looked toward the water lily spring in the distance and then looked back at the forest of swords. The sword Scarred had fallen toward had a new color on it. That color was green and it belonged to a cloth. Scarred's hood had caught on it and the cloth stretched toward Scarred.

Afraid he had been too slow in protecting him, Tenzou frantically looked down.

Between him and the ground was a certain favorite phrase of his.

...A well-endowed blonde!?

A girl wearing a disheveled cloak lay below him.

Tenzou looked down.

Below the soft blonde hair was a face that appeared about to cry. That face contained reddened cheeks and a scar. The half-removed cloak revealed another disheveled outfit below.



Scarred

...An English girl's uniform?

She was not wearing the scarf because it would have gotten in the way of the cloak, but that had allowed the fall to pull on the uniform enough to undo the chest fastener and reveal the scarred skin below.

Her two breasts were currently pressed up against him. He could feel the pressure on his chest and abdomen.

“U-um...”

He heard a voice. The female voice was Scarred's voice. She raised her arms but did not stretch them out. She folded them up at the elbow so her hands weakly reached her own shoulders.

“Th-thank you...very much.”

Tenzou was unsure how to respond to her quiet thanks, so he simply said what entered his mind.

“Scarred...-dono?”

Scarred gave a short gasp and seemed to accept something.

“Judge.”

The ends of her eyebrows lowered.

“U-um. Well, uh...”

She looked at him and was unable to hide the hesitation and uncertainty in her voice, but Tenzou was little different.

...Um. Well, uh... Ahhh!!

He began to panic at the unexpected situation, but one thought did occur to him.

...H-her personality seems so much different now.

Scarred's previous firm tone of voice and resolute actions were nowhere to be found.

At any rate, leaning over a girl was rude, so Tenzou tried to move away.

I might regret doing this later, though, he thought. No. The coin to continue has not been inserted yet, so I have nothing to regret!!

And then...

“Um.”

Scarred stopped him by grabbing his arm with her weak fingers.

The unexpected restraint caused him to lose his balance and fall down even closer to her. He could feel her warm breath on his cheek.

...Ahhh! The coin is in! And that was more than one coin! B-but this isn't over yet. The start button hasn't been pressed yet! Eject! Eject!

“U-um. Did I d-drop my book?” she asked with teary eyes.

Tenzou looked around for the book.

He spotted it above her head between two swords he had yet to remove. He picked up the book she had held the entire time and caught a glimpse of the title as he handed it to her.

...A Far Eastern slang dictionary?

“Thank goodness... Um, Milton said people would take me lightly if they knew I was a girl, so I was using this as reference.”

“T-take you lightly! I would never do that!” said Tenzou reflexively.

“Take her lightly and you get the rock,” added a kobold.

...Shut up.

“Do not worry. The people of the Far East would never look down on someone like you.”

She must be a representative of the fourth level here, guessed Tenzou.

If she was unfamiliar with their language and felt it was her responsibility to protect the fourth level, she must have been incredibly nervous ever since the transport ship arrived.

That must have been why she had spoken so little.

“You must have had it tough. You worked hard to be able to speak on your own. I am very thankful that you managed to speak with me, though.”

As soon as he said that, Scarred opened her eyes a bit and tears spilled from the corners of her eyes.

...Eh? Nooo! I made her cryyyy!

With those thoughts reflexively appearing in his mind, Tenzou tried to speak.

“I-I apologize. Did I say something to hurt you?”

“Oh, no. I-I am the one that needs to apologize.”

Scarred wiped her eyes with her hands and the tears flowed along her scar.

Tenzou saw how the tears also seemed to stain the scars and rough spots on her hands, so he worked to calm himself down.

...Okay, okay, okay. Keep that start button safe! Don't let it get pressed!

He slowly began to move away from her.

“Um...”

“Yes?”

As he began to lift himself up, he saw Scarred's red cheeks which were damp with tears. Her chest and the disheveled uniform covering it were still rising and falling with confused and shallow breathing.

“Could you keep it a secret that I am a girl?”

“Why?”

“Milton and someone else would get mad at me...and I'm afraid.”

Tenzou did not know who this Milton was, but the second reason was likely the real one.

...Come to think of it, I have lived my life while hiding my face.

Different people had different duties, different reasons, and different personalities. If one always insisted on the truth, it could cause pain in some cases.

“Judge. Understood. Keeping secrets is part of a ninja's duties.”

“...Thank goodness.”

She let out a breath, closed her eyes, and her expression relaxed into a smile. That expression and the way her chest rose due to her sigh of relief entered dangerous territory, and then came the finishing blow.

“Um, well... May I call you Master Tenzou?” she asked.

...That “master” pressed the start button!

He frantically began to get up.

At the same time, they heard a voice from the transport ship. It was Toori.

“Hey, Tenzou! Can I ask you a favor!?”

When Scarred heard the voice, she reached for her hood which was caught on the sword, but Tenzou more quickly removed it from the sword and brought it to her.

...Ah.

“Sorry.”

Tenzou held out his hand to stop her and removed himself from her. He then turned toward the ship.

“Wh-wh-wh-wh-what is it!?”

“Well, my sister had this genius idea about wanting a bath. The girls’ bath here is barely big enough for one person, right? So...”

...What is he talking about?”

Scarred energetically put her hood back over her head while still lying on the ground.

“Is there a hot spring around here?” asked the voice.

Scarred closed the chest of her cloak and got up once her face was mostly hidden. She stood next to Tenzou and answered.

“The only hot springs are on the higher levels.”

“There isn’t a single one on the fourth level?” asked Tenzou.

“Not exactly. Lower down...at the foundation...they spill over from the outer shell. But...”

She was not sure how she sounded while speaking without her dictionary.

“But the bottom of the foundation is shaped like icicles, so a bath cannot be built there. And the wind makes it too dangerous to bring a ship up. ...When you say you want a bath, you are not referring to a temporary one, right?”

“Right,” responded Tenzou as he folded his arms. “But we can probably do it.”

“Eh?”

Scarred almost asked him how he could say that, but then she recalled her surroundings.

...He was able to remove these swords so easily.

The care he had given the spring’s water lilies also showed how much knowledge he had, so she decided to ask a different question.

“How?”

“Judge. Just to be clear, this is only a possibility, but I have an idea. With the help of these kobolds, I think we can build a nice bath in about half a day.”

He then asked her something.

“Will you help me?”

“I thought there was some serious issue hanging between those two, but it looks like I was wrong,” commented Masazumi.

She was flipping through some documents Heidi had brought her on the transport ship.

Aoi was facing the graveyard in the inlet.

He could see Tenzou and Scarred carrying the swords with the help of the kobolds.

They seemed to be carrying the swords to the top of the hill so the graveyard could be moved.

The two of them disappeared around a curve in the path, but Aoi continued staring off in that direction.

“Well, Tenzou’s clever, so he wouldn’t hang around with someone he thought hated him. He doesn’t seem to have realized that, though. But he’s a ninja, so they’ll be okay.”

“I see,” said Masazumi with a nod.

...He watches everyone so closely.

With that thought, she finished looking through the documents.

“Okay,” she muttered before turning to Heidi. “I guess we still can’t use the large hall down below, can we? Just gather all the officers and anyone else who’s interested. I want to hold a meeting until lunch.”

“Oh, Neshinbara isn’t here. What should we do about that? He has that thing on his right arm and his injured leg, so he stayed on Musashi. It’ll be a bit crude, but Erimaki and I can record the minutes.”

“Please do,” replied Masazumi just as Mitotsudaira arrived.

“Um, would you like to use my sign frame?”

“Oh, judge. That would be great.”

...I’m putting a burden on the others.

Just as Masazumi had that thought, Mitotsudaira took a sudden action as she walked over.

“...!?”

She shuddered as if her hair was standing on end and she turned a piercing gaze toward the bow of the ship. Light raced in the same direction an instant later.

“Who is it!?”

Mitotsudaira sent two shining chains flying. They were the silver chains spilling from the chain-suppliers at her waist.

She wrapped her fingers around the chains and directed their unstoppable flight toward the bow of the ship and the ocean.

A strange presence there tickled at her nose.

...Who is it!?

She sensed the presence as a scent. The Mitotsudaira family used some of the fragrances sold within Musashi, but she made sure to check those products and the products of rival merchants. The scent coming from the ship's bow was not sold on Musashi and it was twenty meters away.

“Behind the mast next to the ocean!”

As the silver chains circled around the mast, the scenery split apart.

The half-broken mast was soaking in the surface of the ocean and it was casting its shadow onto the water. When one of the silver chains struck that shadow, the shadow shattered like glass.

“A mobility spell with an optical element!?”

Despite Mitotsudaira's question, the movement did not stop. The first chain destroyed the spell and caused the air to burst open, but the second one circled around the mast to wrap around the person creating the presence.

“Go!”

The chain grew tenser and quickly flew in an arc to wrap around the mast.

Mitotsudaira heard an instantaneous sound. It was the sound of metal striking metal.

...!?

She was confused but not by the sound. It was the result of the sound that surprised her.

As the silver chain tried to wrap around the mast and the person behind it, light sprayed from it and it was repelled.

...*What just happened!?*

The chain was created from countless links, so it could bend and wrap with ease. If one struck it in a single spot to repel it, it would merely wrap around the point of the strike. It could be blocked by creating a wall with a spell, but that would not knock it back like this. If the silver chain struck a wall, it would decide on its own to circle around it.

It was almost impossible to repel the silver chain in an instant.

However, that had clearly just happened. The silver chain seemed confused because it raised its end into the air and drew back. Mitotsudaira raised her eyebrows when she saw it.

“...!”

She tried to give new instructions to the chain, but a male voice came from the shadow the mast was casting on the ocean.

“Sorry about that, people. Believe it or not, we were not trying to startle you.”

Three figures appeared and they all belonged to a certain group.

“Trumps!?”

“Testament.”

Mitotsudaira saw three figures appear.

The one in the lead was a black man wearing a white tank top and carrying a long case on either waist.

“Trumps #9, Ben Jonson.”

He smiled and nodded upon hearing his name.

“I am honored that you remember, lady. As for these two...”

Behind him to the right was a female automaton. Her face was expressionless and she controlled her own body with the cross-shaped controllers floating behind her. The armband of the public morals committee was attached to the left arm floating detached from her body. Jonson turned toward her.

“This is #2, F. Walsingham. She is here as our bodyguard.”

Behind him to the left was a short man with glasses and his hair parted to the side. Jonson indicated him with his hand and nodded.

“And this is #7, Charles Howard. He owns England’s fleet and is our treasurer.”

“Testament,” said Howard with a nod. He pushed up his glasses. “U-um... To be honest, I am completely useless other than my money.” He took a breath and began to speak more clearly. “But could we speak a bit on what Musashi and England should do from here on out? We should be holding an international meeting later, so for now I thought we could discuss trade and...”

He began to say something else but shook his head.

“No... I beg you!”

Howard stepped in front of Jonson and Walsingham and suddenly got down on his knees. He then placed his hands on the ground and lowered his head.

“Can you please save England!”

What a wonderful prostration! thought Mitotsudaira.

Mitotsudaira watched the Englishman prostrate himself before them.

The way his forehead touched the ground, the way his elbows bent and tightened his underarm, and the slight bend of his gathered fingertips all made it an irritatingly good prostration. Mitotsudaira shuddered as she thought how much he must have practiced.

...This man is unnecessarily good!

Behind Mitotsudaira and beyond Masazumi, Heidi spoke quietly.

“C’mon, Erimaki. Snap a photo, snap a photo!”

Mitotsudaira found that inappropriate, but she was not sure what to do herself.

If both Masazumi and Shirojiro were there, they would have a clear answer, but Shirojiro was still inside the ship. Mitotsudaira was about to tell Heidi to call for him when she was interrupted.

“What is with all this noise? And just as I was about to return to my morning nap.”

A silver-haired automaton walked up the stairs from within the ship. Everyone let out surprised gasps and Mitotsudaira’s eyes opened wide.

“Horizon!? Should you be awake!?”

“Judge. The remaining feeling of the bonds is gone, so I have determined my OS has built up some level of resistance. Also...”

Horizon suddenly threw a right punch.

“Horizon! I-it’s too soon! Are you sure you’re awake!?”

Mitotsudaira watched Horizon along with Toori. The silver-haired automaton was silently shadow boxing toward the ocean while taking short breaths. She then glanced toward Toori.

“While you have been chatting, the distance between us has only grown.”

“D-damn this girl. You’re serious, aren’t you!? In that case, I’ll start some shadow groping!”

“Calm down,” said Mitotsudaira as she tried to mediate between them.

Horizon produced a towel from somewhere, wiped away her sweat, and faced forward. She tilted her head when she saw Howard prostrating himself.

“I do not know what is going on, but someone please deal with it. ...Oh, I know. How about I cook some breakfast...no, now it would be lunch. At any rate, how about I cook a meal to serve everyone?”

Mitotsudaira joined everyone in stopping Horizon at all costs.

Chapter 19: Those Descending to the Surface

CHAPTER 19

"Those Descending to the Surface"



How does one handle
An excess of thoughts?
Point Allocation (Gratitude)

How does one handle

An excess of thoughts?

Point Allocation (Gratitude)

Below the morning sun, Treasurer Shirojiro and Heidi welcomed their English guests on the diplomatic ship's white deck.

“This is Vice President Honda Masazumi.”

The deck contained a terraced negotiation spot with a lunch table prepared below it.

Masazumi sat at the table with Shirojiro and Heidi to her left.

In front of her were bespectacled Treasurer Charles Howard and Secretary Ben Jonson. Behind those two stood the automaton F. Walsingham.

She felt this was a sufficient group for a meeting between nations, but she also felt there was little need for her own presence. After all, Howard had asked to discuss trade.

Ohiroshiki and Hassan had whipped up a light meal of several courses in the ship's kitchen and Asama and Adele were bringing it out as waitresses.

Once the first large plate of hors d'oeuvres had arrived, Shirojiro held out his hand.

“Please, eat. This is Musashi's famous freshly-caught sashimi with a curry sauce. We will be eating later, so go ahead without us. Yes, we will be eating later.”

As Masazumi faced the three visitors, she lowered her head and glanced past Shirojiro and to Heidi, but the girl was calmly typing away at her sign frame.

Howard finally took a bite of the food and almost looked like he was going to bring a hand to cover his mouth.

“O-oh. Th-the raw fish has a completely separate flavor from the curry which gives it a delicate warmth.”

...You could just come out and say it's disgusting.

Despite Masazumi's thought, Shirojiro showed no mercy toward Jonson who had not touched the food.

“Please, go right ahead.”

“N-no. As an athlete, I must watch what I eat.”

Howard gave Jonson a look that held about five years' worth of scorn, but the athlete poet ignored him. Just as Masazumi began to worry about the meeting, she saw a small light at her feet. Wondering what it was, she realized the white fox Mouse named Erimaki was under the table. Heidi was calmly using her sign frame, so there could only be one reason for Erimaki to be here.

“Do you understand?”

Erimaki held a sign frame so that she could see it. It displayed text that had clearly been written by Heidi.

“Can he come up?”

Instead of nodding, Masazumi beckoned toward Erimaki with her finger. The white fox climbed up her leg, lay down on her right thigh under the table, and pointed the sign frame toward her.

...He has actual weight.

The weight felt less like an actual animal with four legs and more like something wrapped in a round towel.

This is nice, she thought as she read the sign frame.

“I will be opening a chat room so everyone will know what is going on. Connect.”

“Connect : Shared Sign Frame : Shrine-wide Divine Transmission – Limited Domain Authorized via Asama Shrine : Confirmed”

Marube-ya: “Oh, it went through. Thanks, Asamachi. Everyone should be in by default, so just start posting.”

Asama: “Everyone, try not to make your names too long. And if anyone says anything too indecent, you will be temporarily removed. Be careful.”

Me: “Eh? Then am I allowed to say boobs or will saying boobs get me kicked out!? Boo-

“Me has been forcibly removed.”

“Me has reentered.”

Me: “D-dammit. You’re as merciless as ever!”

Asama: “The punishments will only get longer, so please stop saying things like that!”

...What?

Masazumi looked around without actually moving her eyes. The others behind the English group and further in the distance all had sign frames open.

...So this is the divine chat system.

It was a text-based discussion system using sign frames that had been developed by the religions with a monotheistic recreation basis such as Tsirhc.

It was nothing more than exchanging text, so it only created a light load. It could also reach people over long distances and it simplified saving the minutes of a meeting or sending attachments. Its value had been especially evident during the Harmonic Unification War.

The Far East had tried to oppose the other religions, but they were polytheistic, so they had many conflicts over rights to divine transmissions and had therefore not developed a divine transmission discussion system at the time of the war. After the war, IZUMO had joined together the major shrines from different parts of the Far East and finally developed a similar system.

Masazumi had not made a contract on the level needed to open a sign frame, so this was the first time she had seen it.

Asama: “I can attach videos with mine, so just ask if you need it.”

As Masazumi gave a silent expression of admiration, the next course arrived.

“Next is the salad. We have a lightly-smoked raw fish salad with a curry dressing.”

...Are they going for a raw fish joke more than a curry one?

Just as Masazumi realized she was starting to grow accustomed to her classmates, Erimaki produced more text on her lap.

Marube-ya: “While Shiro-kun buys us some time, let’s go over the important points of this trade discussion.”

Marube-ya: “Simply put, this trade discussion with England will discuss what products Musashi and England will trade, under what conditions we will trade them, and when we will begin trading them. Here is what we primarily know.”

Products: Due to the battle with Tres España approaching, primarily foodstuffs.

Conditions: Quality of products = discounted price.

When: To be discussed, but the expiration date of the foodstuffs will determine it.

Smoking Girl: “We aren’t going to sell them fuel and mineral resources? They have a war coming up.”

Marube-ya: “With England’s forest resources and coalfields, they can supply close to 100% of their own fuel. And with ether treatment, the coal can be made into Orei Coke, the highest quality of Orei Metallo. As far as minerals go, we would be buying from them. If we did try to sell them IZUMO’s Scarlet Metal or BIZEN’s White Metal, we would lose money.”

Silver Wolf: “Excuse me a moment. Fuel, minerals, and all other items with a high unit price will rise further in price when they are being hurriedly gathered as supplies before a war. The price was originally high because few can be supplied by the producing area, so the price will not lower when a large number are bought. Products like that are stored up over a long period of time while short-term consumable goods such as food are instead bought cheaply and in large quantities so they will not run out during the war, correct?”

Wise Sister: “Nations are not much different from the high-level ladies shopping at the market, are they?”

Marube-ya: “Judge. That’s more or less it. During the armada battle, the invincible fleet arrives to land in England. They then battle for a week while travelling counterclockwise around England. If this is carried out in full, no other nation will be able to approach England and they will have difficulty resupplying their food.”

Silver Wolf: “How much food does England have stored?”

Marube-ya: “Probably about two weeks’ worth. They may look like they have plenty, but they also have to worry about the food supplies for the ships taking part in the battle and the different defensive units scattered across the surface.”

Silver Wolf: “Also...”

Wise Sister: “Also? Have you finally gone insane, Mitotsudaira!? Excellent!”

Silver Wolf: “I have not! /Oh, sorry about that. This is Adele. I’m Catholic, so I’m borrowing hers. I’m not used to this keyboard, so I accidentally sent an incomplete message. Anyway... Also, the end of the armada battle means England will expand and destroy the power balance of the other nations. Their trade situation will be forced to change. The other nations will try to suppress England’s expansion. In the worst case, that could continue all the way until the Peace of Westphalia. If that happens, England’s trade would be restricted for over five months. To raise morale and sweep away people’s worries, they need food. If they’re thinking of having a festival, they need to at least have some food.”

Worshipper: “Ahhhhh! I could add so much to this conversation, but I’m busy cooking!! Okay, next course is up!”

“Go ahead. Our school’s chefs have poured all of their skill into this raw fish foie gras with a curry sauce.”

Silver Wolf: “Can Masazumi keep up with this? She is only watching after all.”

Asama: “If you don’t know how to react, scratch your head with your right hand.”

Azuma: “Oh, she scratched it. I don’t really get it either, but is that food good?”

Worshipper: “D-do you doubt my skill!? I am invincible when it comes to cooking!”

83⁵¹: “Curry is invincible too. That makes it doubly invincible.”

Asama: “Um, I’ll just ignore all that. Adele seems to be having trouble, so I will set the shared settings to allow ‘hidden’ members. Is there anyone else who can’t post?”

Wise Sister: “Are you stupid?”

Asama: “Eh? Oh! I didn’t say that! I didn’t!! Everyone forget it!”

Me: “Okay, everyone who forgot make a post saying-...”

Asama: “And there’s the final blow! A-anyway, I changed the settings!”

“Flat Vassal has entered.” “Gold Mar has entered.” “Mal-Ga has entered.”

Marube-ya: “Is that everyone? Then let’s continue the discussion.”

“Now, have a light drink. This is a cold, raw fish soup. Curry flavored, of course.”

Howard gulped slightly when he saw the soup arrive in a teacup.

...I’m glad I’m Far Eastern.

With that earnest thought, Masazumi lowered her gaze slightly to look at Erimaki’s sign frame.

The information Heidi was sending her way held great meaning.

For the past two weeks, she had not had any new information on the state of England and Musashi. They had also not been given time before landing to decide their stance concerning England.

That was why she had wanted to gather everyone on the deck and hold a meeting.

...But then these three arrived.

It was possible the timing of their arrival had not been a coincidence.

They wanted to get the upper hand in the negotiations before Musashi could decide on a clear stance.

That was why Shirojiro was almost hostilely stalling for time so they could achieve a consensus.

Fortunately, England had asked for a discussion of trade. Being commerce related, Shirojiro and Heidi could handle it. If it had been a diplomatic issue, Masazumi would have been forced to take charge, but she would have been unable to achieve a consensus with the others because she could not use sign frames.

Currently, Heidi typed out another message.

Marube-ya: “And so the primary product to trade here is food.”

Mal-ga: “What will we be selling? Wheat and meat like always? Or will they finally be introducing potatoes using the Fear Eastern interpretation some other countries have used?”

Mal-ga must be Naruze, guessed Masazumi. That means Gold Mar is Naito.

They dealt with loading and unloading cargo, so they knew what products Musashi carried.

...It would cause an international incident if we introduced potatoes to England.

Potatoes were originally from the New World and had been brought to Europe by Tres España halfway through the 16th century. They could be grown on barren land, they were high in nutrients, and they were easy to cook, so they were expected to make a decent replacement for wheat as a primary food. Many European countries were planning to cultivate potatoes instead of making bread, but not every European country could freely cultivate them.

Marube-ya: “According to the Testament descriptions, most of 17th century Europe still was not cultivating potatoes as standard crops. They were considered dirty because they were root vegetables and they were rumored to be poisonous because of their ugly shape.”

Potatoes could easily become a better primary crop than wheat, so cultivating them was directly linked to the increase of a nation's power as it tried to support a growing population. The different countries held each other in check when it came to recreating the food-related descriptions and potatoes were a perfect example. The only parts of Europe that had begun to cultivate them were certain areas of Tres España and K.P.A.Italia.

If England began cultivating them and therefore ignored the other countries' restraints, it would cause an international incident.

Silver Wolf: "I doubt they will try that here. If they ignored the other countries now, they would be completely isolated even if they won the armada battle. Also, do you know why England cannot cultivate potatoes?"

Gold Mar: "Did something happen?"

Silver Wolf: "Judge. According to the Testament descriptions, Queen Elizabeth ate a potato leaf in a salad and got solanine poisoning. That led to concerns over growing them, so the other countries say England cannot grow them during Elizabeth's reign."

Mitotsudaira came from Hexagone Française which opposed England, so she knew a lot about these issues.

At any rate, what mattered was that England could only grow wheat as a primary crop and their barren land could not produce large crops of wheat. However, wheat could be made into flour, so emergency reserves could be made by gathering it over long periods of time and trading with other countries. They were planning to go to war with Tres España, so they would have been preparing for a long while and they could not quickly make up for it if they failed.

Even knowing that, there was still another question to ask.

Smoking Girl: "Heidi, then what food does England want right now?"

Marube-ya: "Judge. That would be meat."

Below the bridge of the diplomatic ship was a small waiting room. Oriotorai, Yoshinao, and Azuma were sitting around a table. Azuma was grabbing Far Eastern fried potatoes from the table while looking toward Yoshinao across the table.

He asked a question to the man who wore farming clothes yet still wore his crown.

“Is meat really that important, Vice Principal Yoshinao?”

“Judge,” said Yoshinao with a nod.

He turned to the side to look at a bucket containing selectively bred crops brought from Musashi. A lot of those buckets had been brought along for Ohiroshiki’s cooking, but some of them also contained meat wrapped in paper. Yoshinao looked back toward Azuma before speaking.

“In a year, the people of Europe eat an amount of meat equal to their body weight, Azuma-kun. During the same time period, the people of the Far East eat little meat and instead gain their protein from soy. ...Oriotorai-kun, why are you trying to flee? Consuming meat is not forbidden in the Far East. The Testament Union simply decided it could not be a ‘standard food’. There is no problem.”

That’s odd, thought Azuma while tilting his head.

“The Testament Union usually isn’t so lenient when it comes to the Far East.”

“Judge. There is a simple reason for that.”

Yoshinao pulled a knife from his pocket. It was engraved with a wild beast emblem.

“Europe requires a massive amount of meat for food, but religions such as Tsirhc create an incredibly difficult problem concerning the production of meat. Do you know how meat is produced, Azuma-kun?”

Azuma began to think. He thought about what the starting point was for the meat lined up at the butcher shop.

“You own a farm or specialized breeding center and raise cows, pigs, chickens, or sheep?”

“An excellent answer. But we have worked on farms, so we know you are missing an important step.”

Yoshinao swung the hand holding the knife.

The silver light flew in a straight line toward the wrapped meat in the bucket.

“The slaughter.”

The knife stabbed into the watermelon next to the meat.

“Ah.”

Yoshinao rose from his seat and a few sign frames appeared before him.

Me: “What was that, We? This is why you’ll always be We. Can’t you do a little better?”

Asama: “Well, some people hate watermelons because the inside is the same color as blood.”

Worshipper: “Ahh. Just wait a moment. I’ll add it to a dish.”

“Here is the next dish. Raw fish marinated in watermelon juice with a curry dressing.”

Should we really be doing this to them? wondered Masazumi, but it seemed England had reduced the number of victims to just one. She was also concerned

because that victim was their negotiator, but Jonson was preparing a long cylinder labelled “stomach medicine”.

Azuma: “According to Vice Principal Yoshinao, Tsirhc and other religions forbid the taking of life, so meat production was done by non-citizens or people of other religions.”

Silver Wolf: “Judge. Cows especially were a great blessing to humans, so killing them was banned. That is why sheep and pigs became preferred. Workers would perform the killing outside the cities and the butchers would sell it using the excuse that they had found an animal which died of natural causes.”

Marube-ya: “Tres España’s obsession with purity drove out the pagans and other races, so they had fewer and fewer people to do those jobs. That’s why they began to eat more seafood.”

Mal-Ga: “M.H.R.R. had a strong hunting culture, so they still ate a lot of meat. They also have a lot of ways to process the meat. You can think of them as eating meat along with the beer that they drink instead of eating bread.”

...But that butcher work can be done by anyone in the Far East regardless of religion.

Even in the Far East, pointless killing was forbidden. However, they had a culture of hunting, so some interpretations could be used to solve the problem.

Basically, the Far East was used as a scapegoat to share any food which could not be produced elsewhere due to the other countries holding each other in check.

Masazumi had known meat was an important item in trade and she had known the general reason, but this was the first she had heard the related information.

I still have a lot to learn, she thought. If only I could join in the conversation.

She almost petted Erimaki, but stopped herself. She could not let England realize the Mouse was on her lap.

Marube-ya: “Anyway, before entering Mikawa, Musashi had made a bulk contract with England which included an order of meat. They asked for a month’s worth of meat for their population of 400 thousand. At Mikawa, we managed to buy a lot of goods cheaply. That of course included meat, so we were able to procure England’s order of meat there.”

Smoking Girl: “Wait a second. Something about that doesn’t make sense.”

...What doesn’t make sense?

Smoking Girl: “The Testament descriptions have allowed the Far East to use freezing-point refrigerators known as ice houses ever since the Yamato period. For most other countries, the descriptions end at their downfall, but they continued on for the Far East. The engine division manages the ice house aboard Musashi and it allows us to preserve perishable products like meat long enough to trade them. But do you remember how long it took us to get here from Mikawa? Normally, we would barter at the reservations on the Seto Inland Sea, but we weren’t able to stop at the major trading spots like Shikoku and Kyushu. The engine division hasn’t opened the ice room for almost a month. The meat has to be almost at its expiration date.”

Marube-ya: “Judge. That is the main issue here. Does anyone understand what this means?”

Azuma frowned and asked Yoshinao a question.

“You mean the meat on Musashi is about to go bad?”

“Judge. The refrigeration includes spells, but that will only last about two more weeks. If meat like this is sold at market, it would have to be bought the first day. Which means...”

Oriotorai continued for him while munching on an apple she pulled from the bucket.

“I love cheap meat. That taste just before it goes bad is the best.”

“Judge,” muttered Yoshinao as he pulled a pad of paper and a pen from his pocket. “Ignoring the flavor, they will want to drive down the price of meat that must be consumed immediately. We have a month’s worth of meat that will go bad in two weeks, which is half a month. Now, what will this do to the price? Azuma-kun, can you use a simple calculation to tell us?”

“Umm,” thought Azuma. “If they have to consume a month’s worth in half a month, the price will drop by half.”

“Judge. Precisely. Now, let us calculate the amount of meat and the price.”

With a glance toward Azuma, Yoshinao began writing on the memo pad with the pen.

“First, let us calculate how much meat will be sold. In a year, Europeans eat their body weight in meat. On Musashi, that is thought to be approximately 60 kg. According to Heidi-kun just now, England’s meat-eating population is currently 400 thousand. They ordered a month’s worth for that population, so...”

Amount of meat = (400,000 people x 60 kg) x 1/12 of a year = approx. 2000 tons

Azuma posted that calculation to the divine chat.

Me: “Oh, We, you can do math!? That’s amazing! You’re so great! I have to completely rethink my view of you!”

“Shut up. We will have you know that we were certified as a Rank 2 abacus user.”

Did he handle the finances when he ruled his old territory? wondered Azuma.

Meanwhile, Yoshinao continued writing on the paper.

“In Europe, half a cow, or approximately 400 kg of meat, can be bought with three months of the average person’s income. The average Far Eastern daily wage

is 10,000 yen, so let us assume the average person can buy 400 kg of meat with approximately 900 thousand yen. A single household needs over six people's worth," he said. "Now, then. 900 thousand yen is the standard price for 400 kg of meat on the English market."

After writing out the numbers, he tapped the paper with the pen.

"If Musashi sold all of its 2000 tons at this price, how much money would be spent?"

"Um," thought Azuma as he rolled the number of digits around in his head. "If 400 kg is 900 thousand yen, 2000 tons would be...4.5 billion yen."

83: "Indian curry arithmetic gives the same answer."

Flat Vassal: "A-all right! Hard work got me to the same answer!"

"Judge. Well done. We believe you may have been relying on the correct answer, but you still did well, Hassan-kun and Adele-kun."

Me: "Tch. I feel like We and Imperial Boy have been standing out too much lately."

Asama: "Toori-kun, can't you just come out and compliment them?"

Worshipper: "H-how does it feel, Azuma-kun!? Do you feel the joy of the humiliation I always face!?"

...Hm. They aren't attacking my personality, so it doesn't really bother me. And what does he mean by joy?

As Azuma mentally tilted his head, Yoshinao straightened up.

"This trade deal includes that much meat and money, but the value drops by half because of the expiration date," said Yoshinao. "Heidi-kun, what is the profit ratio for meat?"

Marube-ya: “Judge. Normally, it is about 20% of the selling price. The remaining 80% goes to the transportation costs, production costs, and processing costs. Even if you deduct the 20% of profit, reducing the price by half leaves us 30% in the red, so we can’t even recover our expenses.”

Noriki: “The shortened sales period was for their convenience, but we still have to take the loss?”

Marube-ya: “We crossed the provisional national border in battle mode and brought an enemy ship with us. They can claim the delay was out of caution and there’s nothing we can do about it.”

Smoking Girl: “Then can’t we make preserved foods out of it?”

Worshipper: “We don’t have the facilities or equipment for it. We can dry the meat in drying rooms, but the only places aboard Musashi with enough exposure to the wind are on the surface. Unfortunately, it would be unfeasible to build dedicated rooms now. And since Far Eastern culture does not include much meat-eating, we are not allowed a large-scale preservation industry. That is why we use the ice room instead.”

Marube-ya: “Judge. That’s right. They plan to profit by adding the difference in price to their national treasury. We agreed to the trade contract, so we can’t back out even if we lose money. I wonder if the men of Musashi’s merchant guild have been waiting for Shiro-kun to fail. He can always make up for the loss by the end of the year, but taking out loans within Musashi would be a bad idea and those men can be depressingly annoying.”

Flat Vassal: “But, um, even if he makes up for it by the end of the year, losing 30% instead of gaining 20% makes for a loss worth two and a half years’ of the profit.”

Marube-ya: “Judge. That just means the student councils for the next two or three years will end up hating us.”

Everyone: “?”

Marube-ya: “Shiro-kun will take measures to recover and those methods can be really underhanded. I can’t wait to see what he does here. Anyway, it’s time to start the trade discussion, Shiro-kun.”

“Now that you have finished the curry sherbet with raw fish topping, it is time we got down to business.”

Masazumi heard the two people sitting across from her and the two sitting next to her adjust their positions in their seats.

...So it’s starting.

She realized this was her first time seeing one of Bertoni’s business negotiations. Merchants belonged to the same negotiation combat style as a politician like her, so she was curious to see how he would handle it.

Plus, their opponent, Howard, was also a merchant. Not only that, but he was wealthy enough to have presented an entire fleet of ships to Elizabeth. She expected to see high-level bargaining here.

As she watched, Howard leaned forward and placed his clasped fingers on the table. His eyebrows were raised and he was fully prepared for battle. He must have been nervous or expectant because his face was slightly red and he had sweat on his forehead. His aura showed just how important this discussion was.

Bertoni chose to speak first.

“I would like to make the first statement.”

“Y-yes...!? Testament! What is it!?”

Howard leaned further forward to draw closer to Bertoni. Bertoni nodded once and spoke calmly.

“How about we cancel this trade?”

With a fibrous tearing sound, two beams of blood erupted from Howard’s nose.

“Waaaah!!”

Masazumi knocked her chair over as she moved away from the table. Howard held his nose with his left hand and began quickly wiping up the table with the handkerchief in his right hand.

The handkerchief quickly became a blood-soaked rag, so he threw it away in a nearby trashcan and wiped up the rest with a new handkerchief. Shirojiro, however, remained calm.

“From that reaction, I will assume you agree with my suggestion.”

Asama: “Ehhhhh!? How did you reach that conclusion!? Are you insane!?”

Marube-ya: “Oh, my. Shiro-kun is extra lovely when he’s forceful.”

It frightened Masazumi how the assistant treasurer could type that out so calmly. At any rate, she cautiously sat back in her seat and thought.

...Is this normal for negotiations between merchants?

Me: “C’mon, Shiro. You can go further than that.”

...Don’t say anything that will worry me, you idiot.

Meanwhile, Howard’s nosebleed had not stopped.

“Nh... If I die of blood loss here, my wife will kill me!”

How many times are you going to die? she thought. *But we need to start the negotiations.*

“When this happens, you need to look up, hold your nose, and tap the back of your neck two or three times,” she explained.

“Like this?”

Howard held his nose and looked up. Behind him, Walsingham prepared the puppet arm which was drawn back to her chest and displayed text on a sign frame.

“This way?”

She launched a gouging horizontal chop toward Howard’s medulla oblongata.

A sound of impact rang out and blood sprayed up into the air.

“Waaaaah!”

Masazumi knocked her chair over as she frantically moved away from the table and Howard collapsed into a pool of blood on the table.

Everyone fell silent for a while, but Heidi finally spoke slowly.

“The murderer is one of us!”

“You just watched as he died just like the rest of us.”

“C’mon, Masazumi. You’re no fun.”

...Is that really something worth frowning over?

At any rate, Howard energetically recovered, wiped off the table again, and wiped off his face.

“It seems I still have plenty of youth left.”

...What do nosebleeds have to do with youth? And I’ve been doing nothing but playing the straight man for a while now.

“Unfortunately, I have one important reason for cancelling our trade,” said Bertoni in a tone that quieted everyone down. “We are being carefully watched by the Testament Union.”

As Azuma watched the information on the divine chat, he asked Yoshinao a question.

“Why is Bertoni-kun trying to cancel the trade? We may lose money, but we’ll still make 50% of the money, right? Wouldn’t that be better?”

“Azuma-kun, England is not Musashi’s only trading partner. And we can also sell things within Musashi.”

Oh, that’s right, thought Azuma.

Musashi itself was a city. It had an economic cycle within itself.

Yoshinao nodded and continued his explanation.

“Of course, we cannot hope to fully cover the expenses now that the quality of the meat has fallen. However, selling the meat cheaply to Musashi’s butchers would improve Bertoni-kun’s relationship with them and stimulation to Musashi’s own economy would bring thanks from our own people. If we are to lose money either way, he has decided the latter is preferable,” he said. “He is also saying to England that we will not sell the meat to them if we will lose more that way. This prevents England from obtaining the meat while forcing a great loss onto Musashi. He is saying they must at least gain our consent first. Also, using the Testament Union as a shield is an excellent tactic for the negotiation. It allows us to ask about England’s stance toward the Testament Union. And thus...”

“Thus?”

“Judge.” Yoshinao folded his arms. “He can attack somewhat forcefully here.”

Masazumi saw Bertoni place a hand on the table as he spoke.

“If we trade with you, will you not be seen as opposing the Testament Union? That thoughtless action would also lead to the other countries being even more wary of us. We wish to respect England’s interests and are thinking of Musashi’s safety. If we cannot avoid a conflict with the Testament Union, it is in both of our best interests to not go through with this trade.”

That was true, but there was another side to it.

...He’s pointing out that not selling the meat to them is an option for us.

“If neither of us will benefit, we have nothing to sell. We will take responsibility and pay the fee for breaching the contract and then deal with the goods on our own.”

In other words, Musashi would not be giving England anything.

If that happened, it would be fully an issue of Musashi’s responsibility, so Howard could not say anything. He remained silent and that silence pointed toward a certain fact.

...If he isn’t opposing us here, it means they want Musashi’s goods.

They were not unnecessary. They needed them and wished to buy them cheaply, so Howard finally spoke.

“Testament. In that case, let us work together to make this deal beneficial.”

“Judge. That is a most welcome proposal.”

Mal-Ga: “Oh, he’s leaving it unclear whether that means to work together as individuals or as nations. At any rate, the worst case scenario is set at cancelling the trade.”

But Howard leaned forward and spoke as if driving in a nail.

“However, our battle with Tres España is drawing close.”

“Judge. Might I ask when it will begin?”

Howard shook his head.

“That is classified, so I cannot answer. However, the question is whether Musashi’s goods can be consumed or prepared for storage before it begins.”

Masazumi felt a chill when she realized what that truly meant.

...He’s saying the armada battle is beginning in two weeks!

Masazumi went back over the information. The meat within Musashi would expire in two weeks. If England was unsure if they could be consumed or prepared for storage in that time, it meant the battle with Tres España would occur in two weeks.

Gold Mar: “In other words, the armada battle begins two weeks after they receive supplies from Musashi?”

Silver Wolf: “Most likely. Tres España has been strengthening their Grande y Felicísima Armada for a long time now. Also, two weeks from now is a convenient time for the non-human races.”

Why? wondered Masazumi just as Mitotsudaira sent the answer.

Silver Wolf: “The full moon. That night most revitalizes the non-human races who make up most of England. They will likely use that night for the armada battle.”

I see, thought Masazumi just as someone seemed to respond to her understanding.

Marube-ya: “We can sell that information for a lot.”

Heidi's usual talkativeness was cut short because she was calculating out the value of that information.

But, thought Masazumi. In just two weeks, the two great nations of England and Tres España will approach a historical turning point.

That turning point would begin Tres España's decline and England's prosperity. It greatly affected those two nations as well as any related to them.

The world was on the move. In the form of Testament descriptions, this turning point of history would be written about in textbooks long after their deaths. Masazumi thought she could feel history here.

“ ... ”

She shuddered for a moment.

...So this is the true joy of being a politician!

Heidi then posted some additional information.

Marube-ya: “The battle with Tres España will take place in two weeks. Also, when he said the question is whether Musashi's goods can be consumed in time, he was saying the expiration date is near but they will consume it all somehow or other.”

Azuma: “He wasn't suggesting reducing the amount they buy because they can't consume it all?”

Marube-ya: “An opponent as thoroughly prepared as him would not make a complaint like that. We made a bulk contract, so they have to buy it all and they will have some plan for consuming it all. They will have thought about what is possible and used money and personnel to accomplish it. This was nothing but a reminder of what he has already given us.”

Noriki: “So he was just warning us to stop being so forceful?”

Marube-ya: “Judge. To protect England’s producers from Musashi’s cheap goods, they will most likely add tariffs, adjust the price, add compensation fees, and temporarily restrict importing other foreign goods. In other words, they are making a shift toward trading with Musashi and the length will be determined in negotiations within the country and with other countries. I think they have decided it will last until the battle with Tres España.”

...So they are not invincible.

They wanted the goods and they wanted them cheaply, but they had to protect their domestic goods and negotiate trade with other countries.

...But...

Marube-ya: “The battle with Tres España begins in two weeks, but they will decide when the trade begins. That is the problem for us. They will decide on a trade period based on their consumption rate and how long it takes to prepare goods for storage. The period they choose will benefit them and ignore our circumstances. The later the starting date, the lower the price will be driven. We are guaranteed to get a bad deal and it will be Shiro-kun’s responsibility.”

Several pieces of data appeared on the screen. Heidi had created a chart of the circulation of goods throughout England and Ohiroshiki had sent data on England’s factories that processed meat as well as private methods.

...They made this during our conversation here?

Erimaki looked toward Masazumi and Heidi.

“Praise me,” he said.

Good boy, she thought, but could not move her hand for fear of revealing the Mouse’s location.

She did not know how to respond to the confused little thing’s expectations, but a fried tofu icon appeared and disappeared on the sign frame.

Marube-ya: “Afterwards, okay? That’s all you get for now.”

Erimaki nodded and Heidi continued typing.

Marube-ya: “According to this data, England can process a month’s worth of meat for storage if they work for a full week without resting. However, that would require the nation to operate at full capacity which includes the normal citizen’s kitchens. But if they had all the households buy the meat like that, a lot of them would be unhappy, so they will likely use another method.”

That’s right, mentally agreed Masazumi. I was thinking the same thing.

That other method was...

...The processed meat could be bought and sold between the processors and the nation as a whole.

Marube-ya: “Basically, the more they drive down the price of the meat, the more leeway they will have in their original budget. Once the normal households process the meat for storage, the country can buy back what meat the households don’t need. The extra money in their budget and the expectations for the war allow them to pass some money to those households. ...Also, they’re tightening down on goods as the war approaches, but this should help morale.”

All of this told them something.

Marube-ya: “Simply put, England’s strategy is based on this ‘one week’. The meat inside Musashi expires in two weeks, but England wants to delay the beginning of trade for another week. Consuming a month’s worth in a single week will mean four times the normal amount of meat, so the price will drop by 75%. That is why delaying the beginning of trade by a week is best for them.”

She continued typing.

Marube-ya: “Of course, they haven’t mentioned anything about being able to process the meat in a week. If that was the baseline, they could no longer lower the price based on the expiration date causing an excessive supply. That is why

they are purchasing the meat in the name of selling it normally. Our knowledge of this means we want to maintain the two week time limit by beginning trade as soon as tomorrow.”

Silver Wolf “But two weeks means the price drops by half, doesn’t it? We were going to drop out of the deal at that price, so doesn’t this mean the trade will not happen at this rate?”

Heidi started typing while also showing Bertoni a sign frame containing a summary of the data.

Marube-ya: “Shiro-kun came here with an idea for that.”

An idea? wondered Masazumi as Bertoni began to speak.

Musashi’s merchant’s voice was as deep as ever.

“Musashi wishes to rescue England from this danger, but it must be done so the Testament Union does not take issue with the deal.”

“Is there a way to do that?” asked Howard.

Bertoni folded his arms and nodded.

“There is a way of trading that will receive no complaint from the Testament Union and cause no trouble for England.”

That was...

"Musashi and England will hold a joint spring school festival in English territory.”

A spring school festival.

“That...” began Howard.

But Bertoni began speaking plainly without nodding again. To Masazumi, it sounded like the recitation of a pre-arranged statement.

“It will be a history recreation interpretation of the European custom of May Day and the different spring festivals in Asian customs. Musashi contains people from many different countries. Those residents all have their own festivals, so we often gather them together into a single school event that functions as a festival for everyone. Musashi has recently been too busy to hold any of these events, so we still have not held a spring school festival which primarily takes the place of the Duanwu Festival.

“We can do this. As a spring festival, it will naturally include research publications and food stands put out by the different committees and clubs. Musashi is planning to prepare for and open a two-week joint spring festival starting tomorrow. Visitors from England are welcome. As a joint festival, we ask that England hold a festival as well.” Bertoni looked toward Howard once more.

“The stand for Musashi’s student council will handle meat as well as the other trade items. And that includes purchases.”

I see, thought Masazumi. A festival will increase the consumption of food and create secondary economic effects.

Marube-ya: “During the festival, we can make every night a party to liven things up and a lot of people will have to work to make preparations. During the preparations and the festival itself, we hope to sell some of the meat at the stands and other small sales. If possible, we want to double the consumption rate. Doing that will sell the entire month’s supply in the two weeks of the festival. If they are negotiating based on their secret plan to process the meat for storage in a single week, we can negotiate based on our plan to use the festival to double the consumption rate. This is a clash between our true intentions and our claimed intentions.”

...If we do that, the value of the meat won’t fall.

The double supply would halve the value, but doubling the consumption rate would balance it out. In reality, it was not that simple, but...

Mal-Ga: “If we earn a bunch at the festival, it will provide enough of an economic effect. We should be able to make up for our losses.”

“But,” said Howard. “If we do that, won’t the Testament Union complain?”

“Judge. They almost certainly will. But if we take the leading role, you can leave all the blame with us. And if it is based in the school rules, it will become a school event which prevents them from taking military action. They cannot touch us. Musashi will take the leading role in this joint spring festival despite not celebrating Beltane, so we hope for compliance from England. ...Now, we wish to make the transactions for most of the trade goods during the preparation phase while deferring payment to the actual festival. That will accelerate the trade period.”

“I see,” said Howard with a nod.

He then fell silent once more.

Me: “C’mon, man. Quit acting all high-and-mighty and hurry it up. If you get another bloody nose and agree, everyone’ll be happy.”

Hori-ko: “Oh? Bloody noses are happy things to you, Toori-sama? Then I will not hold back.”

Masazumi heard a few screams in the distance, but she ignored them.

...That must mean Horizon signed a sign frame contract.

Brown Algae: “Screams? Screams?”

...How did they get on this line!?

After another long pause, Howard finally nodded.

“Testament. As long as a certificate can be made guaranteeing the accelerated transactions.”

That meant he agreed to the trade between Musashi and England.

...So we've created a path to trade.

Bertoni nodded and turned an expressionless glance toward Howard.

“Judge. We shall prepare one. However...”

“However?” asked Howard just as a message appeared on the sign frame.

Marube-ya: “Ah, wait just a second. I’m about to get some urgent work!”

A dozen or so sign frames appeared around Heidi.

Howard also opened several sign frames, but his were the rectangular style of Protestants. Just as Masazumi wondered what was going on, the two merchants spoke at the exact same moment.

“Let us negotiate the length of the festival and the preparations.”

Masazumi first heard Bertoni’s voice as she looked at the sign frame Heidi had sent her. He spoke calmly to Howard.

“Two weeks.”

That was the best length because it created a balance with doubled supply and doubled demand.

Marube-ya: “Our profit ratio is 20%. 20% of two weeks is about three days, so the trade period can shrink by that much and we will still earn a profit. That means we can concede down to eleven days.”

However, Howard shook his head as if it were only natural.

“Three days.”

Worshipper: “He’s ignoring the time needed to process the meat and is simply choosing a short time period to give him the upper hand in the negotiation.”

England needed a week to process the meat, but starting there would lead to a larger time period after the negotiation. That was why Howard had set it so low.

...He’s surprisingly reckless.

Bertoni had announced that Musashi would call off the trade if they were losing 30% which would happen at 50% off the original price. That meant seven days and below was off the table. Eight days was the best England could hope for.

Nevertheless, Howard had started at three days.

Some might call it unfair, but there was a reason he had gone through with it.

...He has confidence as England’s treasurer.

Despite Howard’s number, Bertoni’s expression was unfazed and he shook his head.

“A week and seven days for preparation.”

Howard had given a number which was excessively low and Bertoni had remained at the exact same number with a different phrasing.

Howard of course shook his head.

“Three days and one day of preparation.”

...Oh? He conceded a day first but is still pushing for a foundation of three days.

Three days was simply not happening. It was a bluff. But he was sticking with the bluff and treating it as the truth.

...The final agreement England is going for might be “three days and five days of preparation” for a total of eight days.

Musashi would refuse seven days, so they would add one day to make eight.

England needed these goods, but they would never stop focusing on their own interests above all. And if they could not push a bluff through, what good were they?

But Bertoni let out a breath and made a sudden counteroffer.

“One week and five days of preparation.”

He all of a sudden conceded two days.

Bertoni’s offer caused Howard’s eyebrows to rise.

...How interesting.

Howard had thought they would use some condition to negotiate in units of one day.

...But he suddenly gave up two days for nothing in return.

He suspected Musashi had some sort of plan, but unfounded suspicions only led to anxiety. He would continue with his own method.

...I need to give something of equal value to their offer.

“Testament. Three days for the festival and two days for preparation.”

Now they had both conceded two days. He assumed this brought things back on course.

“Musashi will use its transport ships to transport goods to Scotland and the other blocks.”

Bertoni's statement led Howard to tap his right index finger on the table.

...I see. He is trying to buy days with a method other than money.

That gave meaning to the previous two-day concession.

...He is adding the transportation on top of that concession to see if I will make a large concession in return.

To probe out Howard's methods, he had conceded his own days while he still had plenty to spare.

...This is his strategy.

He had played the card of conceded days plus an additional condition while also bringing the starting date closer to his target date.

Howard's target number of days was eight. He had just offered five, so his remaining options were three days' worth of cards and whatever additional conditions he had.

Meanwhile, Musashi's break-even line was likely at eleven days. However, their merchant's cards had been reduced to twelve. He had only one day remaining.

Even if he tried to concede three more days to bring Howard down to eight days, he would end up in the red at nine days. If they continued making concessions as is, they would end up negotiating over eight or nine days.

Eight or nine days.

...That is where the true battle lies.

Also, Howard had already considered the idea of having them make the deliveries with their transport ships.

Aerial ships were the Far East's specialty. England had some technology via IZUMO, but their transport ships for trade and their piloting technology were inferior to Musashi's. That led Howard to his decision.

“Understood. We will leave that to you. As for land ports...”

“We will use the IZUMO trading companies and warehouses located at the destinations. I own them, so we can handle the transportation charges. Think of it as a complimentary service.”

“Testament,” agreed Howard.

He had intended to have them use the transportation companies he owned, but he would retain all the preparation fees if Musashi would cover them instead. In other words, this meant more profit for him.

Accepting this as an additional condition, he conceded one of his cards.

“That should allow some extra time for the festival, so how about three days for the festival and three days for preparations?”

...Now, then.

Howard read Bertoni’s hand.

Bertoni was currently at twelve days. He only had one more day to give. Meanwhile, Howard was at six days and had two days left before reaching his target of eight days.

Because Bertoni only had one card left to play, he would fall to ten days if he wanted to meet Howard’s two.

But Bertoni made another unexpected counteroffer.

“How about seven days for the festival and two days for preparations, making a total of nine days?”

He suddenly reduced his offer by three days.

So he has made his decision, thought Howard.

Bertoni had conceded past his break-even line at eleven days. He may have been planning to make up for the loss with secondary income at the festival, but Howard knew one thing for sure.

...He wants us both to concede three days and settle on nine days.

But Howard did not go along with it.

He cleared his throat.

...I can add a small condition to counteract his three day concession.

“In that case,” said Howard. He went on to state the condition he felt was necessary to achieve a safe trade. “To reduce the burden of the festival and its preparations, England will expand your landing privileges. Musashi’s residents will be allowed on the third level and the second level. How about those two added conditions?”

Those two additional conditions would reduce the burden in preparations and transportation, so it made up for two days of Musashi’s three day concession.

And...

“I will concede one day. That leaves us at three days for the festival and four days for preparations, a total of seven days.”

If they both conceded one more day, they would agree on Howard’s goal of eight days.

And so he showed no unnecessary greed and simply spoke.

“Then again, you might need some more time for preparations, so I will concede one more day.” He took a breath and shrugged. “Eight days. I would like to settle on that length.”

“Toori-sama, does this not put us in danger of going into debt?”

Toori tilted his head as Horizon asked him a question on the deck's forward terrace.

“Why?”

Now it was Horizon's turn to tilt her head. Their heads were tilted in opposite directions.

“Looking at the situation, it seems inevitable. Their negotiator has brought the negotiation to a close.”

“Yeah, but why is that a problem for our cruel merchant?”

“?”

Horizon tilted her head even further and Toori placed a hand on her shoulder.

“Do you want to know what I mean? Here's the best option: let me massage your chest and you'll understand!”

“What a coincidence. I just arrived at the best option as well: if I hit you, I will understand.”

“Okay, okay!”

Toori used both hands to calm Horizon down as she held up a hand in preparation. He then used his chin to indicate the negotiation terrace on the stern of the ship.

“Who do you think that is back there?”

“Shirojiro Bertoni-sama. His opponent is England's treasurer, Howard-sama.”

“Howard is pretty damn good. He isn't just using England's authority here. He's fighting fair and square so as not to tarnish that authority. He isn't going to let his guard down. To be honest, I don't really get it, but if a 'best option' lover like you says he's trouble, Shiro must be in a fair bit of trouble. But...”

“But?”

“Shiro is Musashi’s treasurer. And he isn’t Mr. Impossible like me.” Toori smiled a bit. “They’re both treasurers. Anything Howard can do, Shiro can do too. Shiro can do things that will make a ‘best option’ lover like you think Howard’s in a fair bit of trouble.”

Masazumi held her breath and observed her surroundings.

Currently, Howard had conceded one day and proceeded to bring the negotiation to an end.

As he had made a concession, Musashi would have to answer with a concession as well.

...And that concession has to be accepting his proposal.

Now that he had said eight days was enough, they could no longer get him to concede any more days. They had fallen for his tactic of starting at three days.

...What do we do!?

She knew she must not look toward Bertoni. That would expose him to the uncertainty she was feeling. Instead, she worked to remain expressionless and lowered her gaze to Erimaki.

Me: “Seijun! Tell a bad joke! Tell a terrible joke and buy us some time!!”

...Damn him. I really am going to kill him one of these days!!

Asama: “Sh-she can’t! If she tells a bad joke and he falls out of his seat, he might use that to stand up and end the negotiations!”

Uqui: “Hm. You understand this well, Asama.”

...Wait. Are they indirectly making fun of me here!? If only I could post...

But even if she could, the negotiations would have prevented her from doing so.

...Then what am I supposed to do?

Just as she thought that, she saw a sudden movement. Bertoni had stood up to her left.

“...!?”

Howard and Jonson were too slow to react to his sudden and expressionless action. Walsingham, however, moved the controllers floating behind her back to prepare for an attack, but a sudden voice came from further back and to the right.

“Hold it.”

Mitotsudaira’s voice and the jangling of chains stopped the bodyguard automaton.

As everything fell silent, Bertoni continued to move. He circled around to the side of the table, arrived to the right of Howard, and lightly jumped up into the air.

In midair, he performed a high-level triple axel and...

“That number of days simply will not work, so I beg you to concede further!”

He completed his pose in midair and landed in a prostration.

Masazumi almost cried out, but she managed to press her lips together and swallow the cry.

...Ehhhhhh!?

Marube-ya: “Oh c’mon, Shiro-kun. A Triple Axel Prostration!? I haven’t seen you use that since you nailed it at Interhigh when we were in middle school. Have you been practicing when I wasn’t looking!? I’m falling for you all over again!”

You're okay with this? thought Masazumi, but a glance forward showed Howard's expression had changed.

He had wrinkled his brow, clenched his teeth, and sweat had formed on his forehead.

She followed Howard's gaze and noticed something had appeared between Bertoni's hands as he prostrated himself. He held a cloth-wrapped confectionery box above his head.

...Wh-when did he get that!?

Howard noticed Jonson staring at him from the side, so he held out a hand to stop him.

He could not show how much this had shaken him.

...Splendidly done!

Far Eastern uniforms were known for their long sleeves and wide cuffs. Rotating sideways in midair would wrap those around you and fall out of place on landing. However, this boy's cuffs were neatly spread out the sides and his landing had not caused any noise.

...This is the real deal.

The Testament descriptions said a Far Eastern merchant's special technique was the prostration, so Far Eastern merchants practiced daily to ensure they could perfectly recreate that part of history.

A prostration required shrinking down one's entire body using one's flexibility, so it required exercising the entire body as well as anaerobic exercise. To pull them off required three sets of five hundred training prostrations every single day. Even in England, prostrations were required learning to handle Far Eastern merchants, so Howard knew several different techniques: the Left Prostration, the

Right Prostration, the Over-the-Shoulder Prostration, the Walking Prostration, the Standing Prostration, the Overturned Prostration, etc.

...Simply splendid!

When faced with an authentic prostration, Howard knew his own were nothing but conceited child's play. Far Eastern dance had a technique for forming a sitting position in midair and landing like that, and this was based on that.

In addition, this young merchant had produced confectioneries. In that case, Howard had no choice but to respond. After all...

...I began this discussion with a prostration of my own!

This merchant had conceded to hold the discussion when faced by Howard's prostration.

That meant Howard now had to make a concession when faced with this prostration. If he did not, his own prostration would become nothing but a type of fashion. As England's representative merchant he could not allow that to happen.

"Please raise your head."

However, the boy did not. But even that was...

...Splendid!

A prostration was not to be ended until the other party had given in. As a negotiation skill, it was the ultimate technique in which one would not move an inch until their opponent conceded. While it was a type of bow, it was also the ultimate defense. It allowed any insults to pass over one's head and it prevented one from leaving no matter what trained body tried to make them leave and no matter what attack or removal attempt was made.

Howard gritted his teeth.

"Do you need more time for preparations?"

He received no response, so he took a breath and the confectionery box.

“How about nine days: three days for the festival and six days for preparations?”

Azuma turned toward Yoshinao and Oriotorai with a surprised look.

“Prostrations are amazing, aren’t they!?”

“Don’t try it yourself, okay?” Oriotorai then shrugged. “Nine days? That won’t cut it. I’m not an expert at negotiations, but I’ve done my best to teach you not to do anything halfway.”

“Judge.”

Bertoni rose and bowed toward Howard.

Masazumi saw him slowly return to his seat. His expression was as blank as ever. He looked perfectly composed.

He sat down and placed both hands on the table. Masazumi guessed that was a way of showing he had room to spare in the negotiations and Bertoni went on to lower his head again.

“I appreciate the concession of an extra day for preparations.”

“Testament. Due to the coming battle with Tres España, we do not want to take more time than is necessary.”

Howard’s voice was blank. Not being led by one’s emotions during negotiations was a necessary skill for merchants and it was part of Masazumi’s own politician combat style.

However, that allowed her to guess at his true state.

...He's probably livid with rage.

He had likely wanted to settle on eight days, but another day had been added. This was likely still within his margin of error, but the merchants who wanted to defeat him would use this as ammunition. The specific reason he had been forced to concede that ninth day was also an issue.

...He prostrated first to show his understanding of the Far East.

If he had not done that, he would not have lost the eight day agreement. It had been his own error.

His anger was toward himself, so it would not vanish easily. He could not blame anyone else, so it would simply smolder within him.

But, thought Masazumi. This English merchant is no fool.

Earlier, he had prioritized ending the negotiations at eight days, so he clearly did not like unnecessary gambles. He was proud, but he was steady and would not make an attempt if he did not think it would work. He would build up his strategy and do nothing more than what he planned. Setting the starting point at three days was a sign of that method.

Meanwhile, Bertoni's style still showed he had room to spare. He would aim for an even more advantageous number of days.

...But how is he planning to draw out the fight any longer?

Meanwhile, Howard spoke.

“Then let us agree to nine days and bring this negotiation to-...”

Just as Howard tried to conclude this negotiation, Masazumi heard Bertoni raise both his hands.

“Nine days, you say?”

He nodded.

“ ... ”

And suddenly, he smiled.

Masazumi saw Bertoni's slight smile. His eyes arched and his teeth were partially visible. The expression was downright refreshing.

“ ... ! ”

Walsingham held her arms up in preparation.

Howard seemed to sense something because he sucked in a breath.

On the other hand, Bertoni kept his hands raised.

“That was a truly excellent negotiation. I was completely outdone. As such, I will provide you an additional concession for free.”

“No, thank you!” shouted Howard. “The negotiation is over!!”

“No, I merely said I was outdone. I had not agreed to your proposal, Lord Howard, so the negotiation is not over. After all, Far Eastern merchants always provide perfect complimentary services as part of the negotiation.”

“And what service are you offering?”

To suppress his caution, Howard erased all expression from his face.

“Do not worry,” said Bertoni. “This may be part of the negotiation, but I will not ask for any concession from you. This is a complementary service after all. It is for your sake and it is entirely free of charge.”

This was the first time Masazumi had heard Bertoni use polite language in his negotiation.

She realized Heidi had stopped typing.

Instead, her expression had loosened up.

...Is she enjoying this?

However, Masazumi saw no way that a complimentary service could get Howard to concede anything.

...How is he planning to obtain any more days like this?

As if to answer her question, Bertoni took a small breath, smiled, and spoke.

“I have made many impertinent comments during this negotiation. I believe I have put a great burden on you. As an apology, I will reconsider the length of the trade period.”

He then stated what the “complimentary service” was.

“We can revert to your original suggestion of three days. Yes, that would be best.”

Three days.

After Bertoni went as far as to say that would be “best”, Masazumi turned toward Howard. The merchant was expressionless, but there was a change to his face.

The color of his face had changed from flesh-colored to red and it was quickly growing darker.

The veins on his forehead and nape of his neck were bulging out.

“ ... ”

Suddenly, Howard grabbed his nose and a fibrous tearing sound rang out.

“ ... ! ”

Beam-like geysers of blood burst from both his ears.

“Waaaah!!”

Masazumi knocked her chair over as she moved away from the table.

However...

...Huh? None reached me.

As she had expected, Jonson had toppled his chair backwards to avoid the blood. While trembling, he pointed toward Howard and shouted toward Walsingham.

“Mate! Stop the bleeding! Plug his ears!”

“Testament.”

Walsingham nodded, circled behind Howard, and slammed her palms into either side of his head. Two clear sounds rang out and Howard stopped moving altogether.

Noriki: “That’s a concussion if I’ve ever seen one.”

Flat Vassal: “That automaton has been using nothing but dangerous techniques.”

But Howard finally stirred while lying limp in his chair.

“Kh! I-I apologize, but I cannot move right now! So, um...”

His speech was somewhat slurred.

“Three days!?”

“Judge,” replied Bertoni who was no longer smiling. He had returned to his expressionless state. “As a sign of my apology, I am providing a great concession as a complimentary service. That is all.”

“P-please wait a moment.”

“What is it? Surely you do not mean you cannot prepare and hold the festival in three days. You were the one to propose this. I am merely agreeing with you.”

...I get it.

Bertoni was using Howard’s bluff against him. To end the negotiation at eight days, Howard had set the starting line at three days. It was a bluff, but he had attempted to force it through.

Their information told them England could process all the meat for storage in one week, but what would happen if they only had three days?

...England will only obtain as much preserved meat as they can create in three days.

England could process a month’s worth of meat in one week, but they could only process 3/7 of that in three days. Of the 2000 tons of meat, 4/7 of it would go to waste.

Azuma: “Approximately...1143 tons would end up in the trash!”

As a politician, Masazumi knew how much garbage was created. She recalled the daily amount of kitchen waste created by the average household on Musashi.

...I think it was between 700 grams and 1 kilogram.

Even if it was all rounded up to a kilogram, that was 1,143,000 households’ worth of waste.

London’s population was said to be over 200 thousand. This deal would suddenly create over five times the waste their population did. There was no way they could manage it all.

However...

“Three days. Judge. We will fully comply with your demand.”

...He’s throwing his bluff right back at him.

If they settled on three days, the value of a months' worth of meat would fall to 1/10 of the normal. Even at twice the consumption, that was 1/5.

Nevertheless...

"We are prepared to do what it takes. I want you to understand that."

If Bertoni was going down, he was taking Howard with him.

Mal-Ga: "Why didn't he use this reverse bluff earlier?"

Marube-ya: "He wanted to draw out those additional conditions. We agreed to handle transportation and Lord Howard granted us further landing privileges, remember? If he had used the reverse bluff right away, we wouldn't have gotten those. Those two conditions allow us a lot more freedom in England. Lord Howard decided to end the negotiation right afterwards, so Shiro-kun just barely got this in at the very last second."

...They did a lot to help out.

The transportation and landing privileges would normally be Masazumi's problem as they were political issues, but Musashi's merchant duo had achieved them as well.

...They seek the greatest profit possible.

She felt like she had come to understand their mercantile viewpoint.

They were not wealthy representatives of a great nation like Howard was. They were young merchants on Musashi where merchants of various descents fought over a small and limited pie.

They were greedy and they would forcibly earn a profit even if it meant taking advantage of their opponent.

The idea of using Howard's bluff against him came from that disposition.

And Howard now had to release himself from the reverse bluff Bertoni and Heidi had placed on him. In other words, he had to return to the negotiating table.

...He can't run away now, so he has no choice.

After all, England would create a massive amount of waste if they accepted the three day offer.

Not only would that cause problems for England and its citizens, but he would be effectively punishing England and its citizens for his own failure.

This Howard is not the sort of man who would run from this, thought Masazumi. Someone like that would not be trusted enough to hold the position of England's representative as treasurer.

He had become the great merchant he was because he would take responsibility for his own actions and he had the hidden ability to do so without difficulty.

And to prove it, Howard lightly raised his right hand.

“Testament. Understood. I would love to accept your generous offer.” He nodded once. “But Musashi and the Far East already bear a great burden. As a member of Trumps and therefore a servant of our great nation of England and of our kind Fairy Queen, I do not wish to place any more of a burden upon you. As such...”

As such...

“To show our understanding of Musashi's burden and to give you more flexibility in your work, how about five days for the festival and four days for preparations?”

Howard suggested a total of nine days. Masazumi reacted by looking at Erimaki on her lap.

Silver Wolf: “He wants to eliminate the reverse bluff with the same one day addition we earned from that previous farce?”

“Three days for the festival and two days for preparations,” responded Bertoni.
“Three days is enough for us, so five total gives us plenty of flexibility.”

Bertoni continued with the reverse bluff. He did not intend to release the opponent he had latched onto.

His strategy was clear.

He would concede two days for every one day Howard conceded. It seemed he was conceding more, but Musashi was still at five days. They still had two days left before reaching seven days and those two days meant just under 600 tons of waste. Howard of course wanted to bring that waste down to zero.

“Ten days. Six for the festival and four for preparations. Will that allow Musashi to carry out its work without any extra burden?”

The tone of Howard’s voice had fallen, so Masazumi gulped in her heart. Hiding one’s emotions was a standard of negotiation, but he had allowed this change in tone to show itself.

Marube-ya: “It looks like he’s completely given up on the negotiation. If he sees the loss as growing too great, he will call the entire deal off just like we threatened at the start. We need to sniff out where his limit is from his attitude.”

...In that case, this is the time to back off.

However, Bertoni readily continued speaking.

“We should avoid including your day of rest. Tsirhc considers it immoral to work more than necessary on that day, correct? How about six days for the festival, one day off, and four days for preparations? That is eleven in all.”

Howard fell silent.

He took several breaths. He listened to the waves outside the ship, took a few more breaths, and finally let out a resolved and stifled voice.

“Te-...”

“One more thing,” said Bertoni calmly.

Howard seemed to suddenly realize what that meant and raised his eyebrows slightly.

The English merchant opened his mouth again.

“...!”

Just as he began speaking, Bertoni once more spoke up before he could. However, Bertoni was not addressing Howard this time.

“Mukai, are you listening?”

Howard was left speechless because he did not understand why Bertoni had suddenly called for Mukai Suzu who was blind. Masazumi, on the other hand, did understand.

...So that's it!

She finally realized why she was sitting at that table.

And so...

“Wait, Bertoni. This is not for you to decide.”

“Judge. Then I will leave it to you, vice president.”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi with a nod.

She ignored Howard who seemed confused and instead looked at the divine transmission sign frame Heidi gave her.

It displayed the scene in one of the ship's corridors where Mukai sat on a bench by the wall. Asama sat next to her and the shrine maiden seemed to be controlling the footage.

Masazumi cleared her throat and began.

“Now, Mukai. This may be sudden, but I want you to listen calmly.”

Mukai nodded and visibly prepared herself as Masazumi continued in a definite tone of voice.

“You will be sent to London as a temporary ambassador.”

...Eh?

Suzu did not understand what Masazumi meant.

...An...ambassador?

She had heard the term in politics class. An ambassador was sent to another country as a political representative to speak on behalf of their own country. During the history recreation, the practice had begun in 1455 when K.P.A. Italia's city-state of Milan had sent a diplomat to the city-state of Genoa.

...Eh? You want...me to do that?

Asama and the others had relayed the details of the negotiation to her. But...

...Why?

“U-um...”

“You will be able to freely contact us using sign frame divine transmissions. And Adele, you go as her bodyguard.”

“Eh? Me? U-um... Okay. Judge.”

“W-wait a s-second,” began Suzu. She tried to stop the situation from continuing to progress so quickly. “Wh-why? I am...a lot of trouble. You should...not choose me. That would be...better.”

“Well...” said Masazumi in confusion.

The wavering of Masazumi’s voice told Suzu her worries had been misplaced. She felt bad for what she had said, but at the same time...

...I shouldn’t...make people worry so much.

She wanted to sweep it all away, but it was unlikely to be that easy.

She heard a breath from Masazumi who was unsure what to say and no immediate answer arrived.

However...

“C’mo, Bell-san! How about you leave it at that?”

Toori’s voice suddenly came from the sign frame and Suzu straightened her posture without thinking.

...Will he think...I’m an unpleasant girl?

“Huh? Bell-san, your face is really red. Are you okay?”

“I-I-I’m fine. Just fine. ...Wh-what is it?”

“Eh? Oh, right. You may not have realized it, but even Seijun can’t stand up to you when you question her. That’s what happened here, right?”

“ ... ”

“Listen,” began Toori. “Out of all of us, you’re the one that speaks your mind the clearest, is the most stubborn, and yet takes care of yourself.”

“Th-that...that isn’t...t-true.”

She did not know what to do when he suddenly complimented her like that. She wanted to go hide somewhere, but then she would miss out on the important thing he had to say.

“Wh-what should I...do?”

“It’s simple. Y’see, that money-lover and that flat-chested girl who can’t tell a joke to save her life are-...! S-Seijun! I think your aim’s gotten better!”

“Y-you shouldn’t...do that, M-Masazumi,” said Suzu. “The tsukkomi...is Horizon’s j-job.”

Asama lowered her head along with everyone else.

...That’s not entirely wrong, but it isn’t exactly right either.

However, she somehow understood what Toori meant. Shirojiro had spoken her name and Masazumi had supported the decision for the same reason.

...She’ll immediately tell you if you shouldn’t do something.

Anyone could tell the difference between what they should and should not do. But when faced with those things, could everyone come out and say it without compromising or making excuses? Most people could likely do so when it came to protecting those who were important to them, but Suzu was a little different.

...She can say it when it comes to Horizon.

As seen in her essay from a while back, Suzu respected Horizon. She had said she loved Toori, so it would not be unusual if Horizon held a complicated place in her heart. But Suzu had not forgotten about Horizon and she had continued to value her relationship with Horizon as it had been back then.

She did not waver.

She was blind, so if she wavered, she might not be able to trust anything even if she received help. She did not rely on her vision, so her decisions were instantaneous and that decision always occurred within herself. Letting it leave her would only let it decay.

“Bell-san, can you continue on like that and act as a diplomat for a bit? Seijun and that money-lover will teach you the more difficult things. I’ll contact your parents, so-... Wait, wait! Seijun! Don’t say you won’t let me do it. Don’t worry. I’ll put on some clothes, so don’t worry. It’ll just be knee socks, though! ...Anyway, Bell-san. You’ll get a nice room, eat nice food, bathe in a nice big bath, and sleep in a bed so big you’ll sink down into it. There’s nothing to worry about. If someone fires a shell at you, Adele will protect you.”

“Diplomacy doesn’t have such extreme highs and lows!”

Everyone shouted back at Toori without thinking, but Suzu’s tone was still doubtful.

“W-will I really...be okay?”

“You will, Mukai. This is Masazumi. It will only last two weeks and your freedom there is guaranteed. The festival will begin after a few days and that means we should be able to visit you more frequently.”

“Th-then...what do I need to...do?”

“A diplomat has two jobs. First, act as an intermediary between us and England. Second, you have the right to make decisions on our behalf if England insists on a decision.”

“Th-that...that’s...t-too much for...me.”

“Hm? Bell-san, don’t think about it so much. It’s easy as can be.”

“R-really?”

“Yeah,” answered Toori. “You just have to be our ally like you always are. If you think anything is bad for us, just say no. If you think it’s perfectly fine, then say yes.”

“R-really? I-is that...really all...it is?”

That's the hardest part, but she finds it hard to believe that's "all" it is, thought Asama. She really is a virtuous person. It is most impressive she managed to remain like that in this filthy class. If some monster tries to contaminate her, I'll shoot them.

Toori then replied to Suzu's question.

"I'm asking you to do this because your ability to do that is perfect for the job."

"R-really?" said Suzu. "Then...I'll do it."

Suzu nodded as if trying to convince herself, so Asama rustled her sleeves as she gently hugged Suzu. She used her strength and warmth to tell Suzu to do her best and Suzu nodded again.

"M-make sure to...come get me, e-everyone."

"Sure thing," said Toori.

Everyone else nodded as well and Kimi's voice came from the sign frame.

"Suzu hasn't signed a sign frame contract, has she? Asama, make a quick contract with her. Also, Adele is Catholic, so give her a quick lesson on using Shinto sign frames. If anything happens, Adele would be able to use it more quickly."

Kimi then gave further instructions but via divine message rather than by voice.

"Also, Adele mentioned that Suzu heard an odd noise coming from England. It apparently sounded like construction or a bell. It occasionally comes from the Tower of London up above, so sending Suzu there has another meaning."

"Do you think there is something there?"

"I don't know, but I am curious. Suzu knows a lot about sounds. If she found it odd enough to question it, it must be something not heard in everyday life on Musashi. England must be making various preparations for the Apocalypse and their battle with Tres España, and it wouldn't hurt to come across one of those things."

“I see,” said Asama with a nod.

Masazumi nodded back at her before turning toward Howard.

...The sound Mukai heard does not fit with anything England has mentioned so far.

They had held a light negotiation, but nothing like that had been brought up. However, it was doubtful Mukai was wrong about something like this.

...Now we can send Mukai herself to check on it.

Most diplomats were also spies. With that in mind, Masazumi spoke to Howard.

“We have no objection to sending a diplomat. And it seems to me that bringing one of our residents into England as evidence of our diplomatic relationship would make a sufficient achievement for England even if it would not remain in history. How about it?”

After asking her question, she immediately spoke again.

“Aoi, can we send Futayo as another bodyguard for Mukai?”

“Eh? Oh, sure, sure.”

“Me?” cut in Futayo. “I am currently consuming curry.”

“Judge.” Masazumi nodded. “This will begin tomorrow. Adele Balfette is solely defensive and she is from a Hexagone Française family. She is perfect for protecting a diplomat who could effectively be taken hostage, but she and Mukai have not trained for their roles. For the next few days, the student council and the cultural types will be busy preparing for the festival, so the bodyguard has to come from the chancellor’s officers. However, England would be wary of Mitotsudaira because she is from Hexagone Française, Naomasa has yet to repair Jizuri Suzaku, Crossunite is busy being gay, and we can’t exactly send the two Technohexen from M.H.R.R. That leaves you, Futayo.”

“Masazumi, I think one of those reasons was a bit odd.”

...Just ignore it.

“Anyway, how about it, Futayo? With you along, Mukai will have Musashi’s greatest defense and offense with her. Also, Mukai’s words and actions will hold authority as Musashi’s ambassador. You know what that means, don’t you?”

“Judge. In other words, she will not just be the representative of Musashi Ariadust Academy, but of the Far East as a whole. That makes her a representative of the Far East’s ruler, Princess Horizon. ...It seems Mukai-sama wishes to express her understanding as well.”

Bertoni nodded next to Masazumi and spread his hands.

“If you think of them as hostages, this is a splendid achievement, isn’t it? You can take away Musashi’s greatest defense and offense. ...Then again, it also means you are holding a bomb, but thinking about how to announce your results is another joy of being a merchant, don’t you think?”

“Testament. That is indeed wonderful. Now, the festival will be seven days with one of those days set aside for rest, and...now that we have come this far, how about 5 days for preparations? Let us agree on twelve days total.” Howard shrugged his shoulders. “However, the other merchants’ attempts to interfere should be quite intense now that I have conceded so much. If possible, I would like to be given full authority over England’s side of this deal. Would that be okay?”

“You mean you want us to sign a contract saying Musashi can only trade with England through you?”

“Testament.” Howard nodded. “And if you are the one to make the request, I can use it as an excuse to suppress the other merchants. Also, if you do not charge for the contract, I will be in your debt for that small amount.”

“Judge. Then that is what we shall do.”

Bertoni nodded and produced a sign frame containing a seal in his palm. Howard smiled bitterly but still held out his hand. As he prepared for a handshake, his palm also showed a sign frame containing a seal.

...The negotiations are over.

Bertoni reached across the table and completed the handshake. At the same time, a sign frame appeared.

“Approved : Religion-Independent Seal : Subject – Far East, England, Official Trade Negotiation – Transmitting to Both Administrations : Confirmed”

Fragments of light scattered from their palms. As the light scattered to the ground, the two merchants stood from their seats. Heidi also stood up while typing.

Marube-ya: “Ahh, ahh. So we have to use our own transport ship? It is true we have some extra fuel because they haven’t been running lately. And, well, I guess persuading them is part of our job.”

Howard must have realized what she was thinking because he released Bertoni’s hand and spoke.

“We will send a carriage for your ambassador tomorrow morning. And in a few days, your representatives should be invited to our royal palace. After a party, we will hold a meeting. That will likely be no sooner than the evening of the festival’s first day.”

“Judge. We appreciate it. Is that information free?”

“Testament. Think of it as a complimentary service.” Howard bowed deeply.

“After two days to make arrangements, the twelve days for the preparations and festival will begin. With that, the party, and the meeting, I hope we will both have excellent business with profitable results.”

●Importation of the Potato●



Sis! Sis! Everyone's been talking about po-tay-toes or po-tah-toes or whatever, but did they really not have potatoes in medieval Europe!?



Heh heh heh. Potato-head brother, how was Europe supposed to have foods from the New World before the New World's discovery? Sweet potatoes, corn, tomatoes, pumpkins, bell peppers, pineapples, and chili peppers are the same. Tobacco came from the New World as well. Anyway, I wrote up a list of years when the potato was imported to different countries.

- England: Arrived 1586. Cultivation encouraged starting in mid-17th century.
- Tres España: Arrived circa 1534. Cultivation began in certain areas starting in mid-16th century.
- K.P.A. Italia: Arrived circa 1566. Cultivation began in certain areas starting circa 1582.
- M.H.R.R.: Arrived circa 1588. Cultivation began in the western areas starting midway through the Thirty Years' War.
- Hexagone Française: Arrived at the end of the 16th century. Small amounts cultivated in very small areas starting at the same time.
- Far East: Arrived circa 1600. Cultivation for food began circa 1624.



That's a wide range. And the Far East got them by circa 1600? Isn't that too soon?



Some theories say 1576 or 1598, but it's a bit unclear because the taro and the sweet potato were brought in at about the same time and the European ships bringing them in were filled with all sorts of things. It's thought they had definitely arrived by 1610, though. They were apparently grown even in the cold areas of Tohoku.



But wasn't Europe really slow to start growing it? Weren't people saying growing them provided enough food for a population explosion? So isn't this a bit slow?



Heh heh heh. Foolish brother. The earth was warmer during the middle ages, so it was easier to grow food than it is now. But there was a little ice age during the 14th century and the peak hit right around mid-16th century. Until then, wheat and other crops were still producing enough food, but everything grew too cold by the 1600's. Wheat's output dropped even further and potatoes finally became a primary source of food.

But in Europe, it was disliked for being a root vegetable and looking ugly, so it was slow to spread even once people started growing it. The Far East did not avoid it like that, so it spread more quickly than in Europe. Also, some areas used the 1576 theory during the history recreation.



You mean it's possible Nobunaga and Hideyoshi shouted "Hot damn! French fries!" at some point?



First of all, French fries is an English term. Second of all, bow down in apology toward Mikawa this very instant.

Study

Importation of the Potato

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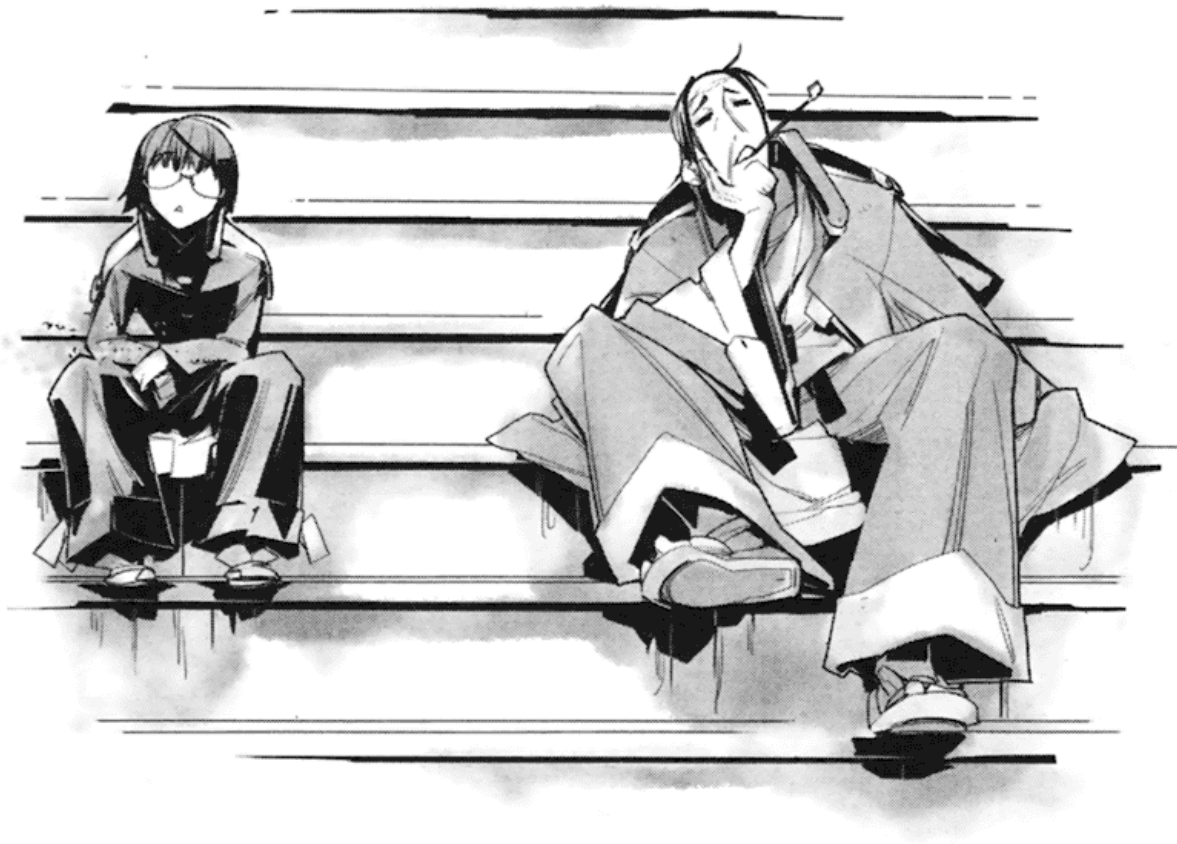
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Chapter 20: Those Meeting in a Separate Place

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"Those Meeting in a Separate Place"



There are mysteries
And there are questions
But what should one do to control oneself?
Point Allocation (Stress)

There are mysteries

And there are questions

But what should one do to control oneself?

Point Allocation (Stress)

The setting sun shone through many dark objects.

Lined up alongside those evening clouds were eight ships. Each of the ships was visible due to the thin clouds they trailed as they crossed the west wind.

Together, the eight ships formed the almost eight kilometer length of Musashi. Its back was turned to England which was five times that length away. The three ships on the port side and the three ships on the starboard side each formed a fan-shaped formation, the two center ships had their altitudes staggered by the height of one ship, and those two ships were currently switching out their altitudes.

This process allowed for the approach of transport ships and the loading of cargo. Cargo was also being circulated between each of Musashi's ships.

The transfer was naturally using the towing belts and the circulating towing belts which formed a loop, but the transport pipes which used the up and down motion of the two center ships was used for the cargo transferred vertically.

People moved about both inside and outside the ships as they busily loaded the large wooden cargo containers with materials.

The workers from the larger races or the beastman races handled the hard labor by pushing and pulling the cargo. Those with wings or the ability to fly carried the lighter cargo between ships.

The distribution officer of the industrial committee, which worked for the student council, supervised Musashi's ship port control division which worked with those

related to Shinto or other religions to carry out massive amounts of divine transmissions.

Once the transport ships were loaded with cargo they would moor at the inner side of one of Musashi's ships. They never moved into the open sky. They were waiting for a certain event before doing that.

“So these are preparations for the spring festival starting the day after tomorrow.”

A voice spoke as if looking down on the alarms, sounds of machinery, and roaring of the air. The voice came from the back of the rear center ship named Okutama which was currently rising. Specifically, it came from the bridge in front of Musashi Ariadust Academy.

Two people sat on the stairs leading from the bridge to the central road. One was the bespectacled boy named Neshinbara. The other sat three people's widths to the side.

“President Sakai, don't you have to prepare for tomorrow?”

He really looks after us, thought Neshinbara as he asked Sakai his question.

“Augesvarer-kun sent me a divine message about Musashi and England's spring festival starting the day after tomorrow, but don't you have to prepare for Musashi entering port tomorrow and don't you have to handle the procedure for landing the transport ships in England?”

“Well, from what I heard, the trade is being carried out while camouflaged as festival stands. That means I have to go meet with the transaction officer of their industrial committee and explain why we're calling off the trade deal. What excuse am I supposed to make?”

“Why not just write ‘due to personal reasons’ on the form? They will make sure to stick with whatever story you give.”

“I suppose.”

Sakai held his unlit kiseru in his mouth.

“But why are you here?” asked Neshinbara.

“Well, Toussaint, that’s because you’re here. Makiko-kun made a request concerning you.”

“What? What did she say?”

“Judge. She told me to leave you alone.”

“Is that so?”

Neshinbara half-closed his eyes and spread out either side of his mouth.

...The adults around here seem to fail at everything.

Meanwhile, Sakai raised the corner of his mouth in a smile.

“But at my age, you stop being shy and you no longer care if people hate you, so I came to ask you about something.”

“If it’s about Tres España, you could always ask Naruze-kun.”

“It’s not that. It’s about the Double Border Crest.”

Neshinbara could tell his expression had changed. He turned toward Sakai who was backlit by the southern sky.

“As I was instructed after the Battle of Mikawa, I researched what information I could on Musashi and worked to bring it all together.”

“And what did you find?”

Neshinbara shook his head.

“It first appeared about thirty years ago, it is spread out across every country, and...this last one is not exactly definite.”

“You can decide that after saying it. Oh, and I’ll decide it for myself after I hear it.”

“Judge.” Neshinbara nodded, hesitated, and spoke. “It is not definite, but there is something like a pattern in the Princess Disappearances which are closely related to the Double Border Crest.”

“And that is?”

“Judge,” said Neshinbara again before giving his prediction based on his research. “Most likely, the Princess Disappearances happen to people with an inherited name or the people around them.”

“I cannot say so for certain. There are exceptions like Vice President Honda-kun’s mother. Neither Honda-kun nor her father has an inherited name, after all. All I can say is there is pattern with some exceptions.”

Neshinbara held up his right hand. He produced a sign frame, made sure Macbeth did not burst from the bandages wrapped around his right arm, and produced a certain diagram from his own personal databank.

Several rectangles were connected from top to bottom by lines.

“Is this a genealogy?” asked Sakai as he peered at it.

“Judge. It is a genealogy of inherited names, centered on the different student councils and chancellor’s officers. Of these, there are still none who are known for sure to be victims, but with some certainly seem to have disappeared.”

“That’s a scary thing to hear. I ran across something like that recently.”

“That’s another mystery. You have an inherited name and you witnessed a Princess Disappearance, but it’s been over a month and you haven’t disappeared.”

“You make it sound like you want me to disappear. We can’t have that.” Sakai looked back at the genealogy. “But it is true the different countries need to be clearer when their inherited names retire. Of course, making things so clear can be taken advantage of and people can be given opposing inherited names, so the bigger the name, the more likely they are to simply disappear one day.”

“Was it the same with Ii Naomasa?”

“Yeah, it was.”

The bitter smile on Sakai’s face prompted Neshinbara to apologize, but Sakai’s bitter smile only deepened.

“What is your personal opinion at this point? I want to know how you feel about it.”

“Judge. I have no proof, but whether this is a naturally occurring mysterious phenomenon or something artificial, it isn’t completely random. It is targeted toward those with inherited names and those related to them.”

“Toussaint.”

“What is it?”

“Judge.” Sakai nodded and pointed at the genealogy. “I would appreciate it if you would continue investigating this. I don’t really know how to use the divine network.”

“I suppose not.”

Neshinbara smiled bitterly and raised his right arm while looking up at a loaded transport ship heading to Tama. He used his left hand to lightly tap on the bandages wrapped around his right arm.

“But I wish something could be done about this.”

As Neshinbara looked at his bandaged arm, Sakai took a breath and asked a question.

“Is that stylish curse difficult to deal with?”

“There’s nothing stylish about it. It’s just plain difficult,” replied Neshinbara.

...It’s more dangerous than it is inconvenient.

“President Sakai, have you ever been cursed?”

“Yes, back when I was in active duty. I had it immediately purified with a ‘Song of Atsuta’ purification, so I only had to avoid drinking alcohol for two or three days. What’s a modern curse like?”

“I subconsciously do things to harm my king.” Neshinbara shrugged. “While using the divine network, the words of Macbeth will expand without me noticing and it will use a sign frame behind me to try to leak information on the student council. It also tries to send divine messages containing other inside information.”

“So it’s like a virus?”

“In relation to the divine network, yes. The curse is based on the character of Macbeth, so it can correspond to other things as well. The scariest one was when it tried to carve a knife out of a cokepen in class. That one was bad.”

Sakai tilted his head and finally slid his fingers horizontally across his throat.

“Like that? To Toori?”

“No, I apparently tried to throw it. I was actually trying to sharpen the pen to write with, but according to Honda...Samurai Honda-kun who noticed and stopped me, my fingers were holding the blade and preparing to throw it.”

“Not bad, Da-chan’s daughter. ...Had anyone else noticed?”

Neshinbara started to shake his head but stopped.

“Oh, Oriotorai-sensei had. When I went to discuss taking some time off from the academy, she held a pen in her fingers and asked ‘because of this?’ ”

I guess this is part of growing more experienced, thought Neshinbara with a sigh.

“When I was at home typing up a manuscript for an event, I all of a sudden realized I had ordered a ton of tear-jerking porn games to be delivered to the student council. That one was really serious. About three of them were shipped because I didn’t cancel them in time, but it was more of an issue for my printing budget than for Aoi-kun’s life. After all, he has Asama-kun and Urquiaga-kun to ‘test for poison’. Also...”

“Also?”

“When I check the divine network at home, I just find a bunch of criticism about me. When I try to do something else such as working on my manuscript, I end up thinking about how everyone will complain that I’m doing that when I should be doing student council work. That may be true right now, but I start wondering if they will keep saying it even when I get back to work and only work on my manuscript in my free time. Those thoughts keep me from focusing on the manuscript. What about you, President Sakai? How do you handle it when people say things to you on a daily basis?”

“Well, I’m old enough to just brush it off by telling them not to push an old man so hard. And when I was younger, the divine network was not this advanced. It only existed on a very local level, but that meant both sides had to bet everything when they argued.”

“Sakakibara-sama made a name for himself like that, didn’t he?”

“That’s right. But how does the current Sakakibara plan to make a name for himself?”

“I don’t have the skill needed for an inherited name and right now I’m only a hindrance.”

“Sakakibara was often a hindrance to us.”

“Really?” asked Neshinbara.

“When we were fighting the remnants of Imagawa, that idiot suddenly said ‘Ah, it’s time for cram school! Bye!’ when it turned 6 PM. You can’t just say bye! Losing you means losing one of our walls! To get back at him, Da-chan and I threw the Imagawa students through the windows of the cram school.”

“Not much has changed with you, has it?”

“But,” said Sakai. “I think hesitation is a good thing. It’s these times you spend wondering what to do that you can look back on and realize how full a life you lived. But if you want to remove that curse, I think your best bet is to ask that English girl.”

“I can meet her and complete the play to bring Macbeth to an end, I can move even further from England, or I can choose to step down from the stage... I suppose that last one means it will disappear if I quit the student council.”

“The festival preparations begin the day after tomorrow. What will you do?”

Neshinbara shrugged.

“They’re holding a doujinshi event then and I had planned to attend. I doubt anyone will stop by my booth, but I guess I’ll be leaving the festival preparations to the others.”

He let out an exasperated sigh and opened a sign frame.

“According to Augesvarer-kun’s message, they’re eating yakiniku on a fourth level beach tonight. She also said something about a hot spring. What are they up to down there?”

“They’re always up to something.”

“Judge,” said Neshinbara as if replying to his own question. He then glanced at the school building behind them. “I’ve been keeping my distance for two weeks now and they really are strange when viewed from outside.”

Night fell and the cold air descended from the sky.

Light filled a beach next to the shallow ocean. That beach bordered a village on a low hill.

The lights were gathered just a bit up the beach from the receding waves. Several fires were built there. They illuminated metal plates placed over other fires built down in holes in the sand. Gathered around those metal plates were people, both human and non-human.

Most of them wore Far Eastern uniforms, but some of them were locals who had close to a 50/50 ratio between human and non-human. They were gathered here for one reason.

“I am Treasurer Shirojiro Bertoni of Musashi Ariadust Academy’s student council. With the coming spring festival preparations and festival proper, I look forward to the friendship between our two countries, to my money, and to my profit.”

“Shiro-kun, Shiro-kun. Convincing them based on their emotions and taking all the profit for yourself is fine, but you probably shouldn’t announce it like that.”

“I see. I suppose it would be best to make an apology here, Heidi. Now, everyone, it seems I have to pretend this festival is to bring friendship between our two countries. It is a pain, but-...”

“You aren’t apologizing at all!” shouted everyone else.

Shirojiro nodded in response.

“Do not worry. If your throat dries out from complaining so much and you need a drink, you will be forced to visit a merchant. I can listen to your complaints all day long, so you will continue to lose more and more. And now that we know who stands at the top, let us continue,” he said. “Listen. Whenever a merchant says he will treat you to something, you can assume he has an ulterior motive, but

if someone else is paying you to eat, eat as much as you can. The more you eat, the more you gain. Let us enjoy the feast tonight. Laugh, enjoy yourselves, and chat with each other. The smiles are free, after all. Now, a toast to our countries' friendship and to my glorious money!"

Everyone silently hung their heads down and clanked their glasses and mugs together.

On the westernmost end of the gathering, Oriotorai stood from her seat with a wine cask attached to the hard point at her waist. Her face was already red.

"Let's eat yakiniku someone else is paying for!"

With that, the feast (supposedly) for friendship began.

Chapter 21: The Two in the Meeting Place

CHAPTER 21

"The Two in the Meeting Place"



What is it
That cannot be done alone?
Point Allocation (Misunderstanding)

What is it

That cannot be done alone?

Point Allocation (Misunderstanding)

Masazumi could see the sea from where she sat.

Naruze and Naito sat between her and the sea while Mitotsudaira sat between her and the hill. Balfette and Mukai were sitting among the English and eating with the local children. According to Mukai, she could still hear the periodic odd sound from the upper levels, but the local children and adults had not noticed it.

...But she never doubts herself and thinks she might be imagining it.

That was just how much she trusted her ears.

...That level of confidence is rare for her.

As the representative of the English village, Scarred sat with Crossunite, Aoi, and Horizon. Despite being a student council officer, Masazumi had a reason for not sitting with the English.

...I hold a political position, so they are worried about a spy or attacker.

Naruze, Naito, and Mitotsudaira were her bodyguards.

Mitotsudaira came from Hexagone Française who historically did not get along with England, so anyone plotting something would think twice when they saw her next to Masazumi. Masazumi felt they were going overboard, but she understood why they were doing it.

...But...

There was one problem.

...I've never really eaten yakiniku.

“How am I supposed to eat this?”

Mikawa had mostly produced vegetables and fish, so the most meat Masazumi had eaten there was the occasional chicken.

She was used to eating at home, so she had never had only a sauce plate, chopsticks, and rice bowl.

...This isn't enough!

She was used to having three dishes on the table and there was no soup here, so it all felt horribly lacking.

...Is the meat really that good? I guess it is different from ham or bacon.

The students who had been aboard the transport ship began to move. Masazumi saw Futayo take command of the grill.

“Ch-chief! After two weeks, meat is so delicious, isn't it!?”

“Was yakiniku sauce this delicious before?”

“Thick slice,” displayed Tonbokiri.

“Listen up!” declared Futayo. “Everything past this line is my territory.”

That's more than half, silently commented Masazumi before turning to her right.

There, Mitotsudaira was adding more and more vegetables to her plate.

...Girls do need their fiber.

Guessing Mitotsudaira was displaying a more normal method of eating than the others, Masazumi began emulating her.

...I'll start with some vegetables.

She looked over and found all the vegetables gone from the grill. They had also vanished from the large plate to her side. A glance over at Mitotsudaira showed her plate was empty too. The girl sighed and then smiled.

“Okay, I ate all the vegetables. Now I can eat as much meat as I want.”

...She really is a wolf!

“W-wait a second! I didn’t get any of the vegetables!”

“Eh? Will you be okay tomorrow morning?”

...Whose fault do you think it is?

Meanwhile, Naito and Naruze were speaking across the table.

“Margot, I’m sorry I haven’t been very useful lately. ...Look, you can eat this meat while imagining it’s me. With chicken, eat the wings! With pork, eat the butt! With beef, eat the legs or arms or whatever!”

“Ga-chan, that sounds great, but I’m pacing myself to have room for the yakisoba and Asamachi’s five-grain fried rice afterwards. Oh, and Seijun? This table eats a lot, so be careful. Ga-chan and I both have wings, so we consume about twice the calories of a normal person and Mito-tsan-...”

Suddenly, a naked boy and Horizon showed up. They both held large plates that required both hands. The plates contained various cuts of meat.

“Hey! Heidi sent these over for Nate.”

As she held out the meat, Horizon gave a satisfied nod.

“You are a carnivore, Mitotsudaira-sama? I will remember that.”

“N-no, I am not exactly carnivorous.”

“You put up a good fight for the past two weeks, so just leave it at that, okay?”

Mitotsudaira hesitated for a moment but ultimately took the two plates with her silver chains.

“Do you love meat that much?” asked Masazumi.

She only asked out of curiosity, but Mitotsudaira blushed.

“That is my nature as a Bête du Personne.”

“I can explain,” cut in Naito. “You know how carnivores and herbivores have different cells in their stomachs and their organs are otherwise different, right? For example, rabbits and guinea pigs have trouble digesting meat while tigers and ferrets have trouble digesting plants.”

“I do think I’ve heard that solid pet food is divided into those two categories.”

“Judge.” Naito nodded. “Herbivores can acquire the nutrients they need just by eating plants, but carnivores can’t eat plants. To gain those nutrients, they eat herbivores and gain the nutrients stored up in their body. Well, wolves are basically carnivores. Dogs are pretty omnivorous, but Mito-tsan isn’t a dog. That pretty much covers it.”

“So...”

...It must have taken a toll on her to go two weeks without meat.

She had not been imagining it when she thought Mitotsudaira was not eating much.

...She must have decided going hungry was better than eating grains and vegetables which could make her sick.

If Mitotsudaira accepted Masazumi’s ignorance as an excuse, it showed how tolerant she was.

“So that’s why you brought this over, Aoi.”

For someone who walked around naked, he could be quite thoughtful at times like this. Masazumi wanted to criticize him for not having a clear stance on England, but he was not completely slacking off.

Meanwhile, the idiot had a huge grin on his face.

“Meat beats sweets, right?”

“I-I will eat sweets too. I would love it if you sent some over. I am half human, remember? ...Wait, Horizon?”

Horizon was using chopsticks to hold some cooked meat out toward Nate from the side. She expressionlessly held up the sauce-covered meat.

“Judge. Have this entire piece,” she said. “Now, say ah. This is a ceremony to recognize what you have done for us.”

What is going on here? wondered Masazumi as Mitotsudaira blushed and tried to draw back from the meat held up to her.

However, the naked boy circled behind her and grabbed her shoulders. She shrunk down, her eyebrows twisted, and her nose twitched a few times as the steam hit it.

“ ... ”

She closed her eyes, opened her lips with a resigned look, and stuck her tongue out a bit as she received Horizon’s chopsticks. She pursed her lips and drew in the steaming piece of food with the back of her teeth.

“Nn...”

She lightly bit down and slowly swallowed.

She took a breath.

She stretched up a bit and then relaxed as her expression loosened up.

“~~!”

She leaned forward to escape the idiot’s hands and quickly covered her face with her hands.

“Wait, wait! What’s wrong, Nate?”



The excess silver chains twisted their long forms into words.

“Embarrassed. Troubled.”

She tugged and pulled back the intelligent chain that was speaking out of turn. She then slipped from her short chair and her butt fell to the sandy ground. She placed her hands between her legs.

“ ... ”

With her eyes closed, she raised her chin to look up at Horizon. She looked like a baby bird asking for food, but everyone exchanged a glance as she wordlessly stretched her throat up.

...Is this...?

Before Masazumi or anyone else could say anything, Horizon grabbed the idiot's hand and handed him another pair of chopsticks.

With the griller and feeder roles set, they worked to feed Mitotsudaira. Everyone watched as the girl continually narrowed her eyes every time she had meat brought to her mouth.

Masazumi sighed and looked around.

...This got out of hand quickly.

“Hey,” she called out to the others. “Does anyone have any extra vegetables?”

The tables with a mix between Musashi and England had extra vegetables because some had been brought in from the local area.

With Wet Man and Musashi's princess gone, Scarred was left alone with Tenzou. Tenzou went to hand their extra vegetables to Wet Man and returned.

“Does anyone need anything to drink?” he asked.

“Heh heh heh. Ninja! Get me a beer! Three minutes!”

He was back in thirty seconds. Whenever Scarred tried to speak with him, someone would call out to him and he would quickly return. She was left staring blankly at him.

...He certainly works a lot.

Only he knew her identity, so her look of admiration was hidden deeply beneath her hood. She tried to do her best for the fourth level village, but he completely outdid her in consideration, effort, and especially problem solving.

The same had happened with the hot spring Wet Man had asked them about that morning.

...I never thought he could actually do it.

Scarred recalled what had happened a few hours earlier.

They had finished having the kobolds carry the gathered stones and swords of the graveyard to a hill with a nice view. He had asked her if the original graveyard had contained any remains.

...When I told him no, he simply nodded. He did not question it at all.

That graveyard contained no remains. All it contained was the last thing the people had held and a stone from the spot on which they had fallen.

“Then let us move on to the hot spring.”

His idea was to send water to the hole created when the ground below the graveyard had collapsed.

As a water source, they used the waterway passing between hilltop wheat fields. To create a conduit, they used the unused water pipes the diplomatic ship had brought for the cargo ship.

A few of the living blocks had only been used for remodeling floors and walls, so some leftover walls and a roofs had been set up for the changing room and bath area. They had hired the kobolds to dig up the ground and lay stones for installing the living block.

“Now, all we need to do is pour the water into the hole in the ground.”

She had had her doubts whether that was all it would take, but while they were preparing the floor with the kobolds, new kobolds had poured into the hole along with hot water.

...It was like magic.

But he had explained it.

“Kobolds are spirits that live along veins of ore and land with those veins is more likely to have hot springs. In other words, land with kobolds has heat sources closer to the surface. That means a hole opened where kobolds are will lead to magma or somewhere close to it. As long as the hole does not open up somewhere else, if you pour water in to fill the hole, a blast furnace level of geothermal heat will warm the water and create a natural boiling pot. Basically, we have artificially reproduced the structure of a hot spring.”

England was a floating island and each level and block had its own crust. Accumulated trash on the surface and side walls would be swallowed up and the internal heat would melt it down like a furnace so it could be reused as part of the crust.

This technique took advantage of that aspect of the crust.

“England’s crust is controlled, so a hole leading down this far is quite rare. But if you understand the system, this is not difficult.”

The mud had left the water they had sent in and the geothermal heat had turned it into hot water which rose back up.

From what she had heard, the Far East's mainland had a lot of hot springs and a similar method was used to dilute the much hotter springs in the mountains and send them down to the base where health resorts could be built.

The elders of the village understood how rough this area could be on those working the fields, so they had rejoiced. It would also help with the children's health and with washing clothes.

...Honestly.

Tenzou had surprised her again and again when he had looked after the spring's water lilies and removed the graveyard's swords. And now...

"Okay. I should finally be able to eat," he said as he sat next to her.

Tenzou sat to Scarred's left so as to hide her from the others.

He had planned to do everything he could to protect her identity. Luckily, the most dangerous of his classmates had moved to other seats or wandered off, but that had produced a lot of odd jobs for him and he felt bad about leaving her alone for so long.

"Here you go."

Scarred quietly offered him some grilled meat and vegetables, so he accepted.

Until that morning, he had felt something threatening between the two of them.

...But working together helped us understand how to get along.

But...

"What is it, Scarred-dono? You aren't eating."

"Judge. Um, about that."

Because she was speaking too quietly for the others to hear, she used more feminine language and she looked awkwardly at Tenzou.

“I was just wondering. How do you eat with your scarf like that?”

...I had never thought about it. I guess it's a form of ninja technique. Probably.

He had formed the habit before his earliest memories, so he had never questioned it. In fact, he was a little confused how one ate *without* wearing a scarf.

After thinking for a bit, he decided he should give a standard response.

“It is a ninja technique.”

...Ah, I feel like I just became an incredibly boring guy! But at least I don't tell terrible jokes like Masazumi-dono.

Scarred nodded a few times in understanding and the action contained none of the harshness she showed while hiding her identity.

...This is quite a gap.

He found it hard to remember her using masculine language like she had before.

...She is a good person and a diligent one.

When building the bath, she had not hesitated to work in the dirt to level it off for the floor. When walking through the village, people had called out to her. They were usually thanking her for something she had done for them, so it was obvious she was the type to do work for herself.

...That harshness came from a misunderstanding and her diligence.

And then...

“You really are diligent, aren't you?”

“What?”

He had been thinking of her that way, but he had never thought of himself that way. When she suddenly used that word to describe him, he spoke up without thinking.

Scarred was placing meat on top of the grill while facing him.

“Isn’t it a lot of work? I have only seen you today, but you have done so many things and you are always running around doing things for people.”

“Judge. I suppose so.”

It was true that the horrible people around him were a lost cause, but this was a different issue.

“The truth is, I enjoy it the most,” he said. “At least, that is what I think.”

“What do you mean?”

“Judge.” Tenzou grabbed some meat. “You just saw how I perform a lot of odd jobs and get asked to do a lot of things, right? In a way, I am filling in the gaps everyone else leaves behind, but if you think about it differently, this allows me to be involved in more than anyone else.”

Tenzou nodded and ate the meat Scarred had grilled.

Scarred glanced down at his hand for an instant, but she missed the instant he ate it and bit her lip in regret below her hood.

Tenzou inwardly smiled at that and continued speaking.

“I am not involved too deeply in any one thing, so I feel no responsibility toward it yet I get to play the role of the mini-hero. Butting in on so many things is nice and I can give a ninja’s opinion whenever it is needed. I enjoy helping everyone with what they aren’t doing, what they are trying and failing to do, or what they can’t do. I lose interest in things quickly, so being able to pop in for just the best part like that fits my personality well.”

“Then... You couldn’t continue doing the same thing?” Scarred switched from beef and began grilling pork and chicken. “And...doesn’t that put you on the losing end?”

“The losing end?”

“Judge,” she said. “You may gain something from the things you do, but aren’t some of them things you would rather not do? And aren’t there also times when you end up doing things for someone else so they will not suffer a loss? You fill the gaps the others leave behind by doing the things they do not want to do.”

“I suppose so.”

He did not deny it. Most of the requests were unexpected and he would sometimes make a sacrifice for those in the leading roles who kept the situation moving. But...

“That is the point of a ninja.”

“What do you mean?”

“Judge. A ninja is one who acts while hiding his own heart. And so-...”

He was going to give a businesslike answer of “I do not view it as a loss”, but she spoke up before he could.

“But... That means you still think of it as taking a loss, right? You are still human, after all.”

He could not come up with a response to her preemptive statement.

He thought for a bit, considered how he felt about his job, and said “I suppose so” yet again.

“But it is not just the things you yourself hold that have value,” he added.

“ ... ”

“I have little strength and I cannot use many Shinto spells. But if my actions help someone who has more strength, I can be proud of supporting everyone else. The Testament descriptions decide history ahead of time in this world, but the influential people who protect those descriptions and maintain the proper flow of history require people like if they are to do their jobs. And...”

And...

“Even if I am only involved in just a few of the words written in those history descriptions, that is more than enough for me to feel proud.”

Suddenly, Tenzou recalled an article he had read in the ninja magazine he had bought the other day.

“The Three Major Types of Unpopular Ninja”

1: A ninja who talks on and on about himself.

2: A ninja who denies what the other person says.

3: The kind of ninja who reads this article.

...I fall under all three!!

As he ate more meat, he began to panic and felt like all his strength was being sapped from his butt.

But Scarred suddenly spoke up while sitting next to him.

“Thank you very much.”

...Eh?

He turned toward her and saw her looking down at the grill with a small smile.

“The others are starting to notice.”

Their voices must have grown too loud because the others were glancing over at them. Tenzou straightened his posture and lowered his voice again.

“But you must have it tough too, Scarred-dono.”

“Eh? Wh-why do you-...?”

“Judge. You look after this fourth level, don’t you?”

Scarred smiled bitterly at that. She seemed to be unsure whether to correct him or not.

...Did I get something wrong?

But she sighed and returned her expression to normal.

“This is indeed a tough time for England. The country’s religion changed and we must fight a war with another country. The Testament descriptions say we will prosper the most, but what must we do to gain that and how do we oppose the other countries who will try to suppress it? Most of the residents of the fourth level could be called victims of all this. A lot of them were driven here as scapegoats for political problems,” she explained. “England was moved here 160 years ago during the Harmonic Unification War, but our land was remade via our cooperation with IZUMO. The island used to be made of a single rock, but now we are all separated. And it is true that remaking has left us trailing a bit behind in areas such as farming. Master Tenzou, could-...”

She trailed off.

“Um, may I call you Master Tenzou? I have been calling you that, but I never asked.”

“O-of course. Call me whatever you like!”

“Heh heh heh. Mr. Grass! Cider! One minute!”

He was back in five seconds.

Once he sat back down, Scarred nodded and continued.

“Master Tenzou, could you teach us some of your knowledge?”

Scarred continued her request.

“How to cultivate a wheat field, how to create a waterway, and how to build roads and houses. While carrying the swords and stones to that hill and while building the bath, you asked about all of those things. You know a better way of doing them, don’t you?”

The ninja looked toward her a bit, but...

“Well...” He nodded. “I think that might be making myself a nuisance.”

“Why? Why would you think that?”

“The people here respond with ‘Judge’.”

She was left dumbfounded, so the ninja scratched at his head and continued.

“These people have escaped political strife, so I do not know how abundant a lifestyle they want.”

Scarred realized what he was thinking, so she finally spoke.

“S-sorry.”

“I-it’s fine,” he said. “If I keep that in mind though, we have a pedo-...I mean, a life worshipping agricultural expert. It might be best to just give them the knowledge at first. Rather than giving them a method they must use, we can give them methods they can incorporate if necessary. Plus, we will be back next year, so there is no hurry.”

Scarred accepted his point of view. And...

...Next year.

The people of Musashi would eventually leave. They would return after a year, but with the Apocalypse coming, it was unclear if that would ever happen. However, it relieved her to hear he would be coming again next year. They had had their misunderstandings, but...

...He does not hate me.

“ ... ”

She suddenly realized what her thought meant and stopped herself.

...If he does not hate me, what does he think of me?

She felt this was a foolish thing to think and that she was reading too much into it. She felt reversing the concept to reach the conclusion she wanted was improper. But...

“What is it?” he asked.

“Oh, u-um... Nothing.”

He nodded and took back the question while Scarred was thankful for the hood over her head.

Honestly, why am I thinking such improper things? she thought. *He is a lot like me yet quite different at the same time.*

He put himself on the losing end of things and he gained pride from it.

...On the other hand, I cling to pride. If I could live like him, would I have an easier life?

And...

...I...

Before her thoughts could continue, something shot between the two of them.

“Stop, you two! Scarred! You must not get so close to this strange boy!”

It was Milton.

Tenzou looked toward the black bird that had suddenly flown between him and Scarred.

He wore the coat of an English boys’ uniform and had three legs.

“Honestly! I was wondering if you were getting along with them, but who is this boy!? Do not get so familiar!”

“Milton. Settle down, Milton.”

Scarred’s words reminded Tenzou of what she had said when he had learned she was a girl.

...She said Milton would get mad at her.

He had wondered who that was, but he had never expected this.

“A giant hill myna?”

“No! I, Milton, am a splendid crow! A crow! I am Milton the crow! I am also the messenger of death told of in English legend, but the one time I tried it, I got lost and ended up giving the person a long life! The grim reapers were not happy with me, let me tell you!”

“Here you go, little myna-dono. Have some friendly yakiniku.”

“Nh!? Yakiniku from the hand of the enemy? You must think me a-... Delicious! What kind of meat is this!?”

“It is the skin of a Mikawa Cochin.”

“Nwohhh! This may nearly be cannibalism, but this is some delicious Cochin!!”

“Here, little myna-dono. This squash will cleanse your palate.”

“Kh... And now I must eat my favorite food from the hand of the enemy!? I cannot stand this! But I will remain positive and eat it! Also, I am not a myna!”

Milton began pecking away at the squash.

...There are so many different races in this country.

Musashi had their own half-werewolf who was being fed a few tables over, but it was still interesting to see.

...But does this Milton-dono act as Scarred-dono's guardian?

Tenzou felt Milton was in some kind of assistance role like a butler. That was why he had risked his own safety by flying in between her and a stranger.

Scarred on the other hand...

“Milton, this is Master Tenzou, a ninja. He is Far Eastern technician who moved the broken graveyard and built a hot spring for the fourth level.”

“A hot spring!? How... How lewd!”

...That was fast! He reached that conclusion way too fast!!

Scarred tilted her head with a troubled expression.

“Milton, you had a reason to come here, right? What do you need?”

That question brought fear to Tenzou.

...N-no, this hill myna was probably worried about her as a man!

That was also why he had flown between Scarred and Tenzou. Tenzou did not know if it was due to the species difference, but his actions were getting across to Scarred yet his feelings were not. This meant he came across as something like a parent.

...Ahh. When I was rejected, is this how I looked when I was rejected?

He was so shaken up he accidentally made a redundant sentence. He decided to show his support for the energetic hill myna, but Asama suddenly looked toward them while preparing five-grain fried rice on a grill instead of yakiniku. Her sleeves were rolled up and she was mixing a pile of fried rice with two spatulas while Hanami used sign frames to carry out some work.

“Huh? That crow...”

When Milton realized she was talking about him, he slowly turned toward her. Their gazes met and he gently hid one of his legs behind his body. Asama frowned in response.

“Wh-what is a yatagarasu doing in England? They’re supposed to be doing work for the shrines!”

“I-I am not a yatagarasu! Y-yes, I am just a cute little hill myna!”

Asama ignored him and turned a half-lidded look toward Hanami.

“Hanami, contact my father and ask him why a yatagarasu is eating yakiniku in England. He is probably filled with impurity, so we will have to give him a fist cleansing from a stubborn priest at a shrine that specializes in purification.”

“Eeeeeee! Anything but that!”

While everyone tilted their heads at this exchange, Suzu spoke up while holding a bowl for the fried rice.

“Yata...garasu...? Yata...grass? Is it a plant?”

“Suzu-san made a joke!” whispered someone.

“Was that unintentional!?” whispered someone else.

“Eh? Aren’t you treating her a lot different from me?” complained Masazumi.

Everyone ignored her and Asama took a deep breath to suppress what she wanted to say to Suzu. She then gave a proper explanation.

“The yatagarasu is a spirit beast type of Mouse from the Far East’s Kumano shrines. It is also one of the information-type Mouse models we use. They can of course act as messengers, but they can also store and supply Blessings. They are supposed to be in the care of a Kumano shrine and perform labor when a contract is made with them, but this one...”

As she spoke, Milton turned his back and started moving away from everyone else.

“Wait a second, you runaway Mouse!” shouted Asama when she noticed.

“I must escape! Secret Technique: Crow of the Night!”

As the crow vanished in the darkness, Asama closed one eye, aimed her bow, produced a flash of light from her false eye, and fired.

“Clap!” declared Hanami.

An indistinct shriek could be heard in the distance and Asama sighed.

“Honestly, spirit beasts are surprisingly unstable, so they need regular care in a stable land. I’m impressed it can survive on its own.”

Scarred nodded in response.

“Judge. England has ley lines running through it, but their supply is limited. I have heard strange phenomena are common on the Far Eastern mainland, but they are not very common here.”

“I see.”

Asama nodded and Scarred began eating once more.

However, Toori turned toward her.

“Cloaked gentleman, if you know so much about the ley lines, do you know about the Double Border Crest?”

“The Double Border Crest?”

“Oh, he means this.”

Tenzou used his finger to draw a diagram in the sand. It was a circle with a horizontal line down the center.

“It is said to often appear along with the mysterious disappearances known as the Princess Disappearances.”

The instant he said that, Tenzou heard Scarred gulp.

...*Eh?*

He looked up questioningly and found her drawing back in the firelight. As he wondered what this was about, she spoke up quietly. And she did not use the masculine language she used when speaking to everyone.

“England is looking into that as well.”

Masazumi had barely heard Scarred’s words, but she found them odd.

...*Feminine language?*

But she needed to focus on Scarred’s comment about the situation in England more than on that question.

“Looking into it? Where?”

“Oh.” Scarred looked up and nodded. “Well...”

After a brief hesitation, Scarred continued.

“If you meet those on the higher levels and gain a friendly relationship with them, ask them about a place called Avalon. If you tell them you learned of it from me, they should let you see it.”

“Avalon?”

“Judge.” Scarred nodded. “A flower garden like Avalon is the safest place in this country of fairies. After all, the fairies would be eaten in a forest, drawn under in a river, taken away on a hill, hidden in a mountain, chased on a road, locked in within a house, and drowned in the ocean. Hence, the flower garden. If you meet the gatekeeper, you should gain some kind of hint toward what you seek.”

Scarred paused for a moment.

“Sorry. I am an outsider now, so I do not know what the current state is. I cannot say much, so please do not ask me to show you the way.”

“Judge. Simply knowing England has some information is useful.” Masazumi nodded and looked between Tenzou and Scarred. “Mr. Scarred, if you remember anything else or have something you would rather not say here, feel free to tell Tenzou. As our 1st special duty officer, he takes care of our intelligence work.”

“Judge. If I have a chance, I will tell him what I know concerning the Double Border Crest and the Princess Disappearances.”

“Judge. We appreciate it.” Masazumi glanced across everyone else who looked back at her in confusion. “Now, we need to have the meeting we missed out on earlier due to England’s representatives arriving. I would like to discuss what we will be doing here. After all, we will be truly entering England the day after tomorrow.”

Suddenly, a voice came from the path to the inlet beyond Tenzou and Scarred.

“Finished.”

“Eh?”

Masazumi and everyone else turned toward the sudden voice and saw a 15 cm dog-like creature beyond Tenzou and Scarred. Masazumi knew it was a kobold, but she had never seen one in person before. Scarred and Tenzou exchanged some words with it and Tenzou pulled a 5-yen coin from his wallet and handed it to the kobold. The kobold forcefully threw the coin to the ground.

“I will take it,” said the kobold as it put the coin in its mouth.

“Kh!” groaned Tenzou. “If I get mad, I lose!”

“Don’t you lose either way?” muttered everyone as the kobold left.

Scarred turned toward Masazumi

“It seems the hot spring and bathhouse are ready.”

“I see,” said Aoi as he fed a third plate to Mitotsudaira. He and Horizon were working together to thoroughly cook the cartilage. “Tenzou, you and the cloaked gentleman go take the first bath together. There might be some kinks to work out, so you two go check on it ahead of time.”

“S-Scarred-dono and me!? N-no, that wouldn’t work.”

“Eh? What’s wrong with that?”

Scarred and Tenzou froze in place and did not respond.

...They’re both guys, so I don’t see why it would bother them.

Then again, Masazumi still showered at home rather than using Musashi’s general bath, so she was not one to talk. But before Tenzou or Scarred could say anything, Asama looked up from the fried rice again.

“If you don’t mind, could you two hurry it up?”

“Eh? Wh-why?”

She turned a serious expression toward Masazumi.

“Masazumi, you and I will be taking a bath together after them.”

...*What?*

For about three seconds, Masazumi had no idea what had just been said. Even after three seconds, she had not figured it out, but that was when Naruze spoke up.

“Reality has outdone the doujinshis! Asamasa!? Or Masa-asa!? Which is it!?”

Masazumi did not understand any of that, but the general atmosphere it brought told her it was nothing good. If people started saying what they thought was going on and she denied those possibilities, she had a feeling it would take five hours to arrive at the truth.

“Asama... Um...” She chose her words carefully. “My sex change operation was not completed and I still view myself as a girl.”

“I-I didn’t meant it like that!”

“Heh heh. Bath shrine maiden! So you meant something even more amazing!? Like body soap! What a sexual term! How wonderful!”

“No! I wasn’t talking about body soap or anything inappropriate!” she shouted. “I was talking about her Mouse!”

She held Hanami up in her hand.

“I keep seeing Masazumi borrowing sign frames from Mito today. Handhelds are unstable in England and during attacks like the one by Tres España. So when I heard we had a bath, I thought I could use it as a place of purification to contact the shrine. That way Masazumi can sign a contract for a Mouse.”

“I can get...a Mouse?”

A Mouse required at least an average plan out of the different divine transmission contracts.

They were autonomous and could be given plenty of additional features, so they were quite convenient. But even if they entered sleep mode while inactive, keeping one around used up one Blessing's worth of internal Blessing or ether fuel every week. If one was negligent in feeding them, their information density would thin out and they would be destroyed.

...But in exchange, you get a pet.

When Masazumi had been in Mikawa, the students in elementary and middle school who had a Mouse would always brag about it. Masazumi's family had been poor, so she had barely even had a handheld.

...That's why I wasn't able to head there right away when my mother disappeared.

That would no longer happen if she had a Mouse. And she did kind of want to raise a small animal type like Heidi's white fox.

“But...I have no money.”

“Judge. Then we can cover for it with the student council's divine transmission budget. Shiro-kun, that will work, right?”

“It will, but she will no longer have that money once she graduates. That will cause problems because she will still have to pay for the Mouse.”

Asama smiled.

“If that happens, the shrine will freeze her contract and either buy back the Mouse or hang on to it temporarily. Once she does get some money, she can take it back.”

“Good, good.” Heidi nodded twice. “The Asama Shrine is a monstrous place with only a 2% cancellation rate. Once they get their teeth in you, they never let go.”

“You could just say we have excellent service, you know? Anyway, I will make it a temporary rental with Far Eastern ley line properties, but who is the manager of the ley lines in this area?”

“That myna, maybe?” suggested Tenzou.

“Oh, that’s good. I can have him do it in exchange for keeping quiet about his escape just now.”

“Shiro-kun, I think Asamachi might be a formidable enemy.”

“Yes. Offerings are meant to cover the shrine’s managing costs, but she is so authoritarian that people throw money her way even though she does nothing. She is the enemy of merchants everywhere.”

“Give it a rest,” said Masazumi to the merchants.

Next to her, Mitotsudaira was chewing on the cartilage Horizon had given her and Horizon spoke up.

“Tenzou-sama, shouldn’t you hurry to the bath with Scarred-sama? Once we finish eating, everyone will be waiting. And after this, we intend to perform a ceremony as an offering to the campfire god. We will all dance a super high speed folk dance and the slowest will be thrown into the fire while we all shout excitedly. You do not want to be caught up in that, do you?”

Ohiroshiki suddenly tried to crawl away, but everyone grabbed him and stopped him.

“H-how exciting,” muttered Tenzou.

Scarred then resolutely stood up.

Scarred tugged on Tenzou’s shoulder, exchanged a few words with him, and began walking toward the bath.

As Tenzou followed, he turned back.

“N-no peeping, okay!?”

“Who would peep on you?” muttered Naomasa whose right arm was removed for maintenance.

As everyone nodded in agreement, Tenzou hesitated for a moment and continued after Scarred.

Once the two of them disappeared into the darkness, everyone let out a breath.

“Those two are suspicious,” said Adele slowly.

Adele’s comment brought silence. After a while, Ohiroshiki spoke up as if it was his duty to say something.

“Adele-kun pinpointed exactly what I was trying not to think about.”

“In Ga-chan and my homeland of M.H.R.R, they are developing techniques of making children between two guys or two girls,” said Naito. “As Protestants, England trades with M.H.R.R., so I see nothing wrong with it.”

“That makes it okay?” muttered most everyone else.

Suddenly Azuma looked up. He was sitting politely on a handkerchief spread out on the beach and he was eating yakisoba with chopsticks.

“By the way, I wanted to ask you again about something, Naruze.”

“Hm? What is it?”

“Well.” Azuma nodded. “Could you teach me more about sex?”

After Azuma's final word, Mitotsudaira choked, Asama stabbed her spatulas into the fried rice, Naomasa took a swig of alcohol, Suzu tensed up, the treasurer duo began recording, Adele clenched her fists excitedly, Kimi performed a joyous dance, Urquiaga meaninglessly raised his primary wings, and Naito let out a groan.

"I-I never thought I would be made into the foolish husband of an NTR doujinshi..."

"N-no!? That's not it, Margot! This is a misunderstanding! That's all! Right, Azuma!?"

"Right... I don't really understand, though. All you did was teach me in that underground passageway during the battle. I asked you what it was and you said it was about getting along."

"Ga-chan, you shouldn't give a sudden roadside lesson on that kind of thing."

"Th-that isn't what happened! Azuma! Why are you explaining this so strangely!?"

Everyone began wondering when Naruze would realize they were teasing her, but Masazumi was fairly certain Azuma did not understand the situation.

"You see." He tilted his head. "When I said it to Miriam, she got really mad, so I was wondering if Naruze's explanation or my interpretation of it were wrong. Anyway, she locked me out of our room, so I began knocking on the door shouting 'Miriam! Miriam! I don't understand, but I can tell I was wrong! So please have sex with me!' After that, she sealed the door with a Classic Sign."

"Oh? Poqou-san did?" said everyone with a nod.

However, Azuma did not pick up on their nuance and nodded back.

"She was in a bad mood and made some excuse about being Catholic and needing to drive out evil. Since she won't let me back in, I thought I would ask to see if I could resolve the misunderstanding. Could you teach me, Naruze?"

Everyone turned toward Naruze, but she frantically shook her head and embraced Naito's arm.

“I-I can only teach you so much! So, u-um... Masazumi!”

“Why would you hand this off to me!?”

Masazumi felt a burst of surprise and a flash of anger, so she frantically looked around at the others. At some point, Asama and Naomasa had turned their backs to her and started poking at their grills. They were clearly not going to listen to her. Kimi and Aoi were gesturing welcomingly, but even without hard evidence, she knew for a fact those horrible siblings would turn this into a disaster if she asked them. That left...

“S-sensei!”

The silver chains appeared in the edge of her vision and pointed toward the person in question. Oriotorai was near the ocean with empty bottles stabbed into the sand around her. She was fast asleep with her head resting on a tripod created from three of the bottles. The seaweed on her mouth showed she had enjoyed a full course meal all the way to the yakisoba. Simply put, their teacher would be no use here.

“I would also like to learn about this,” added Horizon.

“Ah! Th-then I will-...gwah! Y-your backhand is wonderful too, Horizon!”

...That guy never learns, does he?

Meanwhile, someone else raised their hand. Surprisingly, it was Futayo.

“I am not familiar with that word either, so I would like to hear this. I am sure you can give a proper explanation, Masazumi.”

The other girls nodded several times while moving to the other side of their grills to have a proper view. This formed a half circle around Masazumi.

...I-I'm trapped!

Just as she was wondering who would save her, Mitotsudaira hid a sign frame behind her hair and positioned it so only Masazumi could see it. Masazumi curiously glanced at it.

“Your only option is to make a bad joke!”

...I don't want to always be limited to that! And what kind of joke am I supposed to make here? Oh!

“I look forward to Seijun sitting down and saying ‘There are five or sex important things to know here’.”

...That idiot said it! What is going on!? Is this the end of the world!? This is it. I can't stand it anymore. I'm just going to die. The commanders during the Three Kingdoms period would “feel shame and die in agony”, but that was due to a rise in blood pressure, right?

However, Azuma, Horizon, and Futayo were staring intently at her, so she had to give some kind of answer.

“Okay, to put it simply...um... when a man and a woman...um...you see...”

“What’s that, Seijun-kun? I can’t hear you! Can you speak uuuup!?”

She swung up her fist and the idiot quickly crawled out of range. She sighed and used the momentum of the breath to speak.

“Anyway!”

Even she could tell she was angry.

“It refers to deepening your relationship with each other! There is nothing else to it!”

Horizon, Futayo, and Azuma all nodded deeply, but everyone else returned to their original seats with exasperated looks. As they did, they began speaking to each other.

“But that was only one thing.”

“Yeah, weren’t there supposed to be five or six things?”

...Are all of them against me!?

Meanwhile, Asama spoke up while moving the finished fried rice to a large place sitting next to the grill.

“Masazumi, we can prepare for the bath after this meeting. Before the contract, we need to check over the plan and perform a quick identity check. Is that okay?”

...I guess I have no other option.

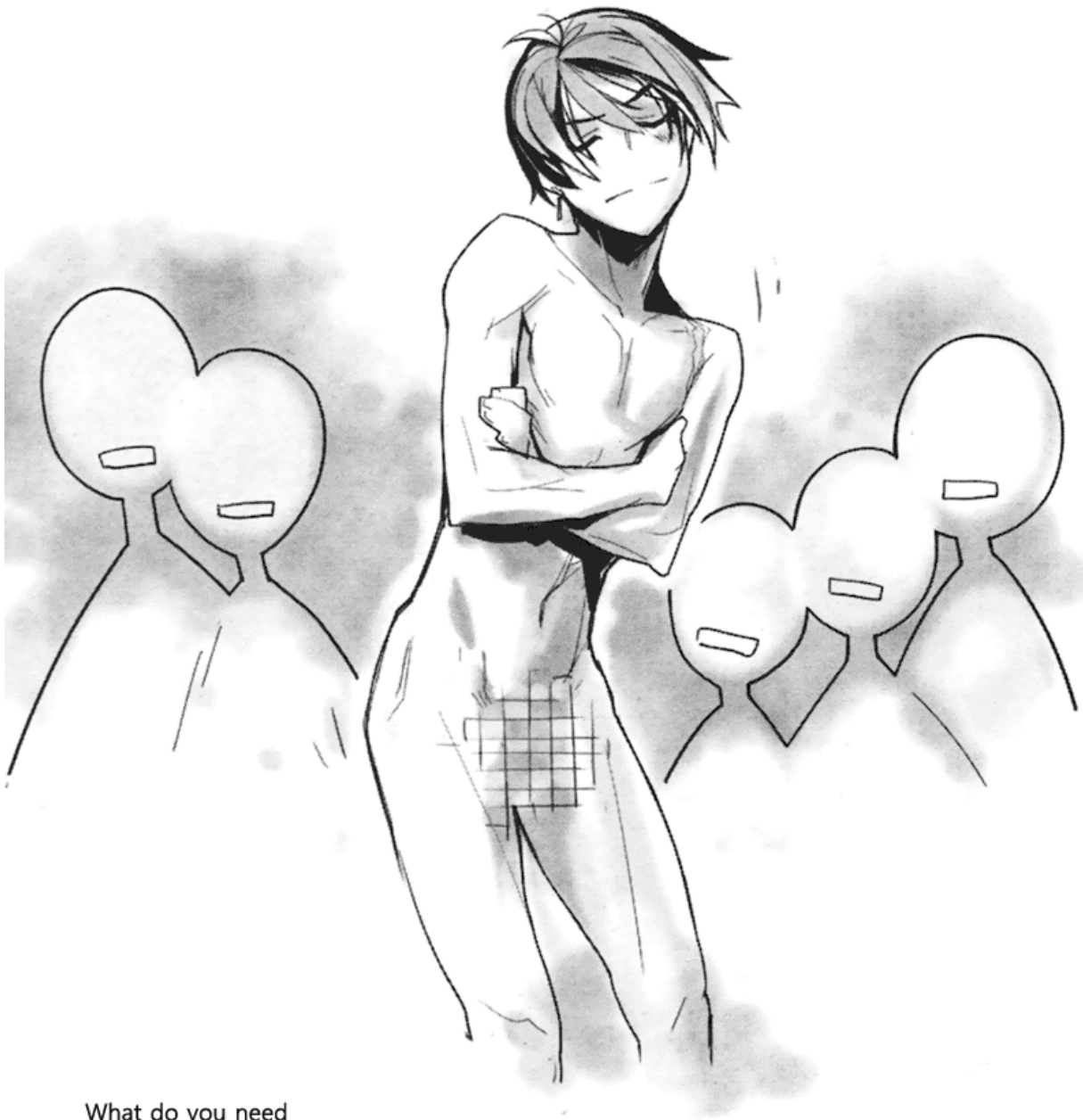
Masazumi sighed and felt a mixture of anticipation and unease, but she decided to keep it all inside for the time being.

“Okay. Before heading to the bath, we can finally have our meeting about England.”

Chapter 22: Replier on the Chopping Block

CHAPTER 22

"Replier on the Chopping Block"



What do you need
To give an answer?

Point Allocation (Next Question)

What do you need

To give an answer?

Point Allocation (Next Question)

It's been a while since I walked on the sand, thought Masazumi on the nighttime beach.

She had visited the beach during the summers while her father was still in Mikawa, but she had stopped after her unfinished sex change operation.

While listening to the nostalgic sound of the sand beneath her feet, she faced the others.

“It does not matter that the English residents are still here. We are discussing our stance toward England, so having them hear us should speed up their understanding. Augesvarer, how is the commercial relationship between England and the other countries?”

England's battle with Tres España was drawing near, so their international connections were bound by religion and the Testament Union. However, it was worth checking to avoid any possible surprises.

“Judge.”

Augesvarer stood up and Erimaki produced a sign frame on her shoulder.

The sign frame showed a map of the area around England.

“Currently, England is primarily trading with Holland and the Protestant principalities of M.H.R.R. M.H.R.R. is backed by the Mlasi Oda forces, but their control through Hashiba is focused on the Catholic principalities. That is why England has not actively tried to form a relationship with Oda's main forces. Still, it seems Hashiba has been trying various things to form a relationship with England,” she said. “But M.H.R.R.'s Catholic side has used the Thirty Years’

War to suppress the Protestant side, so the Protestant principalities can't trade freely with England. That is why most of England's trade is with Holland. Their tariffs are quite low and Holland is also making a good profit off of it, but Holland is fighting the Eighty Years' War against Tres España and they are too small a country for large-scale trade."

"That increases Musashi's value as a trade partner, right?"

"Judge." Heidi nodded. "Over the twelve days starting the day after tomorrow, we need to do our best to trade our other goods in addition to the meat. The everyday goods we brought from Mikawa and could not trade on the way should sell well."

"I see."

Masazumi snapped her fingers through the white glove on her right hand. With that sound, Augesvarer sat down and Masazumi looked across the group again.

"That should be enough on Musashi's current position. We need to get to what is truly important." She took a breath. "During Tres España's attack, we caught a glimpse of a large nation's strength. And the way England is currently treating us shows how nations deal with each other during war. I think we need to discuss once more how we will face England now and the other nations afterwards."

She turned toward the naked boy sitting on the sand before continuing.

"We need to decide how we will recover the Logismoi Oplo and how we will settle the Apocalypse."

As she listened to Masazumi essentially ask a question, Asama felt somehow uncomfortable.

Most of those here were the student council member or an officer, but she was neither. As the successor to the Asama Shrine, she had avoided involving herself

in politics. For the same reason, her assistance in battle was not in the form of offense. She instead defended and prevented damage to the city.

This meeting was taking place after everyone ate, so Suzu and Kimi were there as well.

But it was not an issue of being interested in the topic. She was wondering if her presence was acceptable.

I may have gotten too deeply involved, she thought. Kimi has it easy. As the one who looks after Toori-kun and Horizon, she can stay here without feeling out of place.

But then a sudden thought hit her.

...Come to think of it, I don't think Kimi feels she is out of place anywhere!

Whether at the academy or visiting the shrine, she always had her midriff and the top of her breasts exposed. Asama's father would warn her not to dress like that because it was inappropriate, but he never seemed to have a problem with Kimi dressing that way.

...Well, she probably has her own troubles. She has to. I hope she does.

But meanwhile, Asama's out-of-place feeling only grew.

Masazumi continued speaking in front of everyone.

“There was one important meaning behind choosing to travel from Mikawa to England. As I am sure you all know, England possesses a Logismo Oplo, so they are our enemy as a Testament Union member. But England is also a final chance for us.”

Asama had a lot to think about, but she focused on Masazumi's voice.

“In England, we can withdraw Aoi's proclamation of world domination.”

Futayo reacted to Masazumi's statement.

"We can do that?"

"Sure! That's easy! If I seriously say I take it back, no one'll care!"

Everyone glared at the idiot and he settled down. Masazumi cleared her throat.

"Judge. There is a simple reason why we can withdraw. That is-..."

Before she could continue, Bertoni spoke up while operating a sign frame.

"England has no provisionally ruled Far Eastern land and no reservations. They are an independent land that is truly difficult for a Far Eastern merchant to deal with. Isn't that right, vice president? We announced we would conquer the world, but our conquest would take the form of gathering the deadly sin weapons which are the key to saving the world from the Apocalypse. Essentially, we said we would conquer anyone who refused to give us their Logismo Oplo. That statement is backed by the world's urgency toward the Apocalypse, but it was also caused by the other nations taking the Far East's land. It gives us the justification to overturn the other nations' provisional rule and regain the original Far East."

But...

"But England does not provisionally rule any of the Far East's land, so the Logismo Oplo are our only justification here. Conquering England's land has a different meaning from conquering any other nation's land. We will be recovering our own land for the others, but here we will be taking their land."

"Then how do you think we should deal with them?"

Bertoni did not even turn toward her as he answered the question.

"I believe the rest is your job, vice president."

He was right, so Masazumi nodded and took a breath.

“We need to obtain England’s Logismoï Oplo, but I think it would be best if we did not conquer England. As Bertoni explained, we would be taking land which is not ours, but it would also make for a valuable bargaining chip afterwards.”

“Why do you say that? Not conquering them to avoid taking their land seems only natural to me. For one, it avoids exhausting the resources of both nations,” said Asama. “Why would something so natural be a bargaining chip?”

Masazumi smiled.

“You answered your own question, Asama.”

“Eh?”

Asama tilted her head and Masazumi let out a breath.

...If I had a sign frame, maybe I could write down what I want to say and provide supplementary information orally.

“It is exactly as you said: fighting each other would exhaust the resources of every country involved. And that does not only apply to England. We are sure to face Hexagone Française and M.H.R.R. later, so it goes for them as well. Not to mention Sviet Rus. If we fight, we will deplete each other’s resources. And all of these countries are currently fighting the Thirty Years’ War, fighting Oda, or dealing with internal conflict. If we begin fighting over the Logismoï Oplo, we will wear them down as well which will show an opening to the countries they were originally fighting.”

“But how can we negotiate with them if we do not fight England?”

“When facing the next country along, we can play a card saying we will not attempt to conquer them so long as a certain condition is met. England will set a precedent. Fighting us will create an opening other countries can take advantage of, so some countries will likely accept our terms.”

“That sounds like blackmail to me. Should be profitable, though.”

“Judge,” said Masazumi. “But it is a valuable card. It influences the fate of that country. And if England or some other country avoids depleting their resources by simply returning their Logismo Oplo to us without opposition, more will surely follow. The Logismo Oplo can turn the tide of a battle, but wars between nations are on a much larger scale. Some will decide it is better in the big picture to lose their Logismo Oplo than to fight us. But...”

“But?” said everyone with a frown.

...All of this is based on the assumption that this can be resolved peacefully.

It was true that avoiding conflict was best. However...

“The odds of England or any later country agreeing to return their Logismo Oplo are extremely low.”

After all...

“They will be looking even further into the future.”

What was the future the other countries would be looking toward?

“They will be thinking about the world past the Thirty Years’ War and the Sengoku period. They will be thinking about the world past the Apocalypse where nothing is known. Even in that unknown world, the different nations will continue to fight for power. While dealing with the Apocalypse is important, they do not want to create a powerful enemy by giving the Far East great military might and the credit for saving the world from the Apocalypse.”

She took a breath.

“They will be fine with letting the Far East deal with the Apocalypse, but they will insist that we deplete our resources and lose all our power after the Apocalypse.”

“So they will oppose us?” asked Asama.

Masazumi nodded.

“To be honest, I do not expect anyone to simply return the Logismoi Oplo to us. They may very well ‘lend them to us’ until Westphalia. *And that is why England is the key.* How exactly we acquire England’s Logismoi Oplo will act as a guideline for the other nations and decide Musashi’s fate. Will we be able to peacefully collect the Logismoi Oplo or will we sink into the whirlpool of strategies laid out by the nations that are thinking about the world after the Apocalypse? In other words, if things do not continue peaceably with England, Musashi will enter a state of all-out war with at least the Testament nations of the Testament Union.”

Silence fell over the group.

Masazumi looked toward Aoi. While sitting naked on the sand, he double-checked the seaweed on his crotch, stared toward her with a serious expression, and began pointing at his crotch with both hands.

...I’m not going to comment on it! I’m not!!

While mentally averting her gaze, Masazumi spoke.

“Aoi, I want to hear your policy. How much will you permit in the name of gathering the Logismoi Oplo? Can you say it again now? Are you willing to face all-out war?”

“Well...”

As everyone focused on him, Aoi folded his arms. He finally stood up, but eventually slowly lowered back down again. He then stood up again and repeated the process.

“...”

“Stop performing nude squats!”

Aoi was a bit out of breath, but he still responded.

“Don’t blame me. You’re the one that suddenly asked such a difficult question.”

“Foolish brother,” said the Aoi sister without a smile as she combed Mukai’s hair. “Have you forgotten what happened long ago? Or do you plan to pass that off as something you did while you were still an idiot?”

...Long ago?

If Masazumi did not know what she meant, it had to be something only this group knew about. She did not know how long ago it was, but she was curious what it was if it would help Aoi make up his mind.

...Will they eventually tell me?

Suddenly, a new voice spoke up.

“Kimi.”

This voice was Asama’s. She turned around with her eyebrows slightly raised.

“That is important to us, but it was only a starting point. Starting points tend to be simple things, so it becomes difficult later if you try to use that starting point as the standard for everything. That is why we add all sorts of things to that starting point and use the resulting combination as our current standard. Do you understand that?”

“Heh heh heh. No bra shrine maiden, I understand that better than you. After all, I started out with a small cup size, but it became difficult later and I repeatedly had to cast off my old bra. Do you understand the pain of realizing every bra you have bought is now useless!? Not to mention the anger with no outlet when my mother considerately bought me an over bra at that time! It felt like the world was shouting ‘replace your over brassiere!!’ You have it easy in that regard. You face only the benefits of being so huge.”

“Th-ther is more bad about having large breasts than there is good! It makes your shoulders stiff and it shifts your body’s balance forward so you have to constantly focus on straightening your back. Also-...”

Asama was unable to continue because Balfette raised her front forearm with her head hanging down.

She hid her expression behind her bangs and glasses.

“I will agree that there is nothing good about large breasts. I can allow that.”

But...

“But having a flat chest definitely damages your pride.”

Everyone fell silent for a short time.

“ ... ”

But then applause began. Masazumi instinctually nodded in understanding of the group of clapping people.

But then...

“No, wait. We need to get back on track.”

When she thought about it, she did not know the details of their past.

They of course knew that, so the Aoi sister shrugged and urged Aoi to answer.

“Foolish brother.”

“Hm...”

Her naked younger brother turned around, scratched his head, and looked toward her.

“I haven’t forgotten. It’s just...”

Before he could continue, the Aoi sister suddenly cut in.

“Heh heh. Foolish brother, that is fine. You do not have to say the rest.”

She smiled and brought an end to that line of discussion.

Faced with everyone’s questioning gazes, the sister narrowed her eyes and opened her mouth in a crescent moon shape.

“The rest of that is a political issue which is not what I am concerned with. I only care that my foolish brother has not forgotten his promise.” Her lips formed a clearer smile. “That was all I needed to check as his sister. I have no intention of checking on anything political for the Far East. ...I know. Foolish brother, this is what you mean, isn’t it? You have not forgotten the starting point, but so much has been added on that your foolish and simple mind cannot gather it all together. If that is not it, then bow down before me.”

“Hm. That’s mostly it, but I guess I still owe you a third of a bow,” muttered the idiot with a troubled tone. “I feel like it was all so simple up until Horizon came back.”

But...

“But aside from that, I think I’m overthinking this a bit. As out of character as that may seem. To be blunt, it makes me so happy that I’m too much to handle and I have to tell myself to stay. Sis, you understand, don’t you? You take the wild animal within yourself on a walk and it won’t stop barking and rubbing up against people! You’re such an amazing beast!”

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, I see that your wild animal is on the level of a Spitz. You sound like a cute little toy dog. You could be a Maltese or a Chihuahua, or... Ahh, these breed names sound so dirty! Maltese!? Chihuahua!? You can write them with such dirty kanji! Oh, these are too much to describe even me! Just imagining what an Asama Chihuahua would be is so very dirty!”

“Why would you drag me into this!?”

“Um, enough dog jokes. Let’s get back on topic, Aoi sister...or rather, Aoi.”

Masazumi looked over and the naked boy slowly nodded and folded his arms.

“Well, if I was going to explain my thoughts right now...”

“Yes?”

The idiot nodded.

“You know how Neshinbara and Black Mar are right now? It may be weird or creepy to say I understand, but I’ve been wondering what to do from now on and if what I’m doing is fair to the people around me. In that way, I feel like I’m not all that different from them.”

“Not that different? Neshinbara doesn’t walk around naked,” pointed out Masazumi.

Everyone nodded but began whispering to each other.

“Masazumi really has gotten used to things around here.”

“If you ask me, I think she adapted a lot faster than we did.”

“Hm. Maybe pulling down her pants was the switch to awaken that side of her.”

“You people don’t pull your punches, do you?” muttered Masazumi.

...So Aoi too has been thinking about a lot of things.

...It would be a problem if he wasn’t, but I can’t just openly praise him.

Masazumi let out a breath.

“Well, please gather your thoughts before long. As Howard said earlier today, we will have a proper meeting with England after the party on the festival’s first day in about a week. That will determine what happens to Musashi. You do not need to make a clear decision until then, but I want you to be able to say which way you’re leaning. Even if you do not make up your mind, the world will continue to move and create a situation that requires a decision. I would like for you to make up your mind by the meeting on the opening day of the festival.”

“Yeah, I’d like to have an answer by then.” Aoi looked at her and then turned toward the others. “But I’m not very smart, so it’s hard for me to say exactly what we should do. Still, I intend to never compromise on what I think is wrong and what I think is right.” He turned back toward Masazumi. “So could you wait a bit? I’ll definitely find an answer along those lines.”

Aoi spoke in a quiet and calm tone, but Bertoni narrowed his eyes and cut in.

“Definitely? Will you bet money on it? If you are willing to say ‘definitely’, I can draw up a contract.”

“W-wait, dammit! D-definitely probably! Got it!?”

Masazumi and everyone else hung their heads worriedly, but she changed her train of that.

...He’s an idiot, but he doesn’t leave the important parts to someone else.

He would make the final decision on his own.

...He may be unreliable, but it is my job to support him.

With that thought, she nodded.

“Judge. Understood. I would like to make a proposal to support the optimal decision for the Far East: everyone, please work to provide Aoi with as much information as you can.”

“Judge,” agreed everyone.

But Aoi suddenly tilted his head.

“What will happen if I don’t make up my mind in time?”

“Normally, we would leave England without deciding anything. After all, the leader of the academy will not have decided on our policy. But if a decision is absolutely necessary...” Masazumi paused. “I will take full responsibility and make the decision under my authority as vice president.”

The phrase “full responsibility” caused everyone’s expressions to tense up. After all...

“Someone lower down will decide the policy that the leader could not make up his mind on. It will display the weakness of Musashi’s political leadership and it will cause a lot of pressure from below. I would likely take responsibility and resign to show that it is not a coup d’etat.”

...Well, that’s part of my duty.

They had agreed to mutually support each other, so she would have to take responsibility and cover for his mistakes and weaknesses. If Aoi and Horizon remained, the Far East could continue on. She might have to step down, but it was only natural for her to defend the Far East like that.

...But I would prefer it if that did not happen.

“So personally, I would appreciate it if you made up your mind to a certain extent.”

“Hmm...”

The idiot began thinking. He looked indecisive and unreliable.

...But I suppose this is actually a good thing.

It meant their king viewed his will as important and was willing to think about everyone else too.

...He may have a hard time getting there, but he will do a good job in the end.

“Oh, I know.”

Aoi suddenly clapped his hands together and turned to Horizon.

“Go on a date with me at the festival, Horizon.”

Mitotsudaira handed Heidi a fifth empty plate while looking toward Horizon and the naked boy.

...A date?

“What?”

As Horizon tilted her head, Kimi served some five-grain fried rice to Mitotsudaira via the silver chain.

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, have you put together a proper plan? The trick to a date is to not rely on manuals but to go to all the right places! You might think you have won when you make the girl think you have thought about it yourself yet still done everything she wanted, but that only cuts it in middle school. That is only the starting point! Be extra careful that you do not split the bill while eating! Do not even mistakenly do anything that would ruin the mood like going on the Lackland Experience Tour or the Thames Sewage Ecology Tour! If you are going to choose a tour, you could choose the Mysterious London Execution Tour that I would never go on...Oh, but Horizon can't feel fear, can she? Kwah! Nice mistake, wise sister!”

“Sis! Sis! Is it just me or did you not give any actual answers in that rant?”

Mitotsudaira thought as the siblings spoke.

Th-they pass the conversation back and forth too quickly for me to cut in! I'm just not fast enough! she thought. *Where did the enjoyable dinnertime conversations go? Am I not wanted? Then again, Horizon is still wordlessly focused on feeding me expensive meat. I cannot take her lightly.*

“Wh-why do you want to go on a date with Horizon now?” she asked the two odd siblings.

“Oh, that’s simple. It’s because there’s so much I don’t really understand.”

“Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, I do not understand that explanation at all! Explain it so your wise sister can understand it!”

“Sis! Sis! If you’re so wise, then why can’t you understand? That makes no sense.”

Horizon struck Toori with a backhand blow. He let out a shriek and sank down to a sitting position as the automaton turned a half-lidded glare in his direction.

“To be honest, I would like to hear why you are speaking like that to someone so close to you.”

“B-but punching them is okay!?”

“Those are two different things.”

“Yes, they really are!!”

Things were growing troublesome, so Mitotsudaira helped up Toori with her silver chains and then lightly wrapped them around him so he could not move. Horizon faced him while sitting politely and tapped the sand a few times as if demanding something of him.

“Now, how about you give an answer to it all?”

“Yeah, but...it’s kind of pathetic.”

He took a breath and turned so he was looking only at her.

“Horizon, I want to see and discuss all sorts of things with you. After all, I skipped past all that and went straight for the confession. So I want to go back and discuss all those things now.”

“What would you like to discuss?”

She tilted her head.

“Well...” He thought for a moment. “I want to return the things you lost because of me. But what about you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, y’see... You might not be interested in emotions. I made you cry during the Battle of Mikawa, so you might not want any more if emotions are that painful.”

“I will be blunt,” answered Horizon too quickly for him to prepare. “At the present, I feel emotions are unnecessary.”

The automaton’s answer made Mitotsudaira gasp a bit.

...Unnecessary?

That would mean everything he had done and was doing could be meaningless. And what if that brought him sadness?

“...”

Mitotsudaira did not know what to do, but she instructed her silver chains to prepare to take action at any time. However...

“Mitotsudaira, pass me some yakisoba.”

The silver chains satisfied Kimi's request by quickly moving a metal spatula and a plate. The silver chains wrapped a towel around themselves as a headband and instantly prepared the plate, the soba, the seaweed, and...

"Oh, I don't need any pickled ginger. Give me barley tea instead."

The chain in charge of the ginger slumped dejectedly, but then undulated happily as it stretched toward Heidi who had the small barrel of barley tea. As Kimi took the mid-sized mug of barley tea, Mitotsudaira turned toward Toori.

As he entered her vision once more, he was fine.

He was still alive.

He had not died of sadness. She breathed an inward sigh of relief at that fact.

...Thank goodness.

As she watched, he looked up in the sky and opened his mouth to speak.

"Yeah, I guess that's the normal reaction. Emotions are unnecessary. They're kind of a pain, really."

Mitotsudaira realized why he was fine. He had likely already predicted that Horizon would not want her emotions.

...After all, they are on parallel lines.

As an automaton, Horizon sought the best possible decision that contained no waste. And that was why Kimi asked her a question.

"Horizon, our wolf is about to become a watchdog, so could you tell your future sister something? Why are they unnecessary?"

"Judge. To put it simply, I have gotten by for an entire year without them. I have determined that their absence did not cause me any inconvenience. In that case, the effort put into obtaining them would do nothing but add something extra to my daily life."

“Yeah, I suppose so,” muttered Toori while still staring up into the sky. “Well, even if you say you don’t need them, I long ago decided to get them back.” He lowered his gaze to the sand and scratched at his head with his right hand. “It was my fault, so I have to get them back. You could say I’m reimbursing you by replacing what was lost.”

Reimbursing.

Mitotsudaira almost laughed when she heard that word, so she lowered her head. She heard a few other people stifle their breathing like she had, so everyone’s reaction must have been the same.

...Why is his sense of responsibility so strong in the weirdest ways?

But she could tell he was serious about this. He was the kind of person who would look at the things he had done from all sorts of joking angles, but in the end, he would always circle around to face it from the front.

...That is why he is so hard to deal with.

If he was not so insistent on that final position, he would live an easier life.

Once she had suppressed her laughter and raised her head, she found him was looking her way. His gentle eyes looked past Horizon’s shoulder and toward her.

“The thing is,” he began. “I think Nate suspected this and asked about it, but we – Shiro, Neshinbara, Tenzou, and I – thought something smelled fishy back when the Logismoi Oplo were distributed to the different nations. And even ignoring that, what your father, Lord Motonobu, created were the deadly sins. We had wondered if you would get a person if you brought them all together. So, Horizon, even if you hadn’t come back and even if Mikawa hadn’t blown up, we would’ve negotiated with these countries over the Apocalypse. It didn’t have to be with Musashi or the Far East, but we would’ve gathered the Logismoi Oplo and then performed the Eight Sins Combination! Or maybe the Eight-Level

Combination – The True Deadly Sin! ... Wait, I'm sorry! I'm really sorry! But we really did say that! It was wrong of us, so stop glaring at me!"

"How many times must I tell you I am not glaring at you? ... For reference, this was the first time."

"Nwohhh! I don't even know how to respond to that!!"

Everyone told the two of them to calm down.

Finally, Toori collapsed to his knees once more and turned to Horizon.

"Anyway, we put together a plan to use them in a memorial service for you."

"Then..."

As Horizon began to speak, it was clear what she was going to say. In his original plan, she had not been present.

"I was never needed for what you are doing, was I? In that case, please stop using the retrieval of my emotions as an excuse."

Just as Mitotsudaira realized why she was saying that, Horizon continued.

"After all, this makes all of your injuries and all this conflict a direct result of me being here. You say you want to go on a date to see whether I want my emotions or not, but do you want my presence to be the cause of all of that?"

"That's not it."

"Then I am not needed here. Wouldn't it be better if..."

Just as Horizon was going to say "I was not with the rest of you", Mitotsudaira saw tears dripping down Horizon's cheeks.

...*Eh?*

Mitotsudaira wondered how that was possible, but she remembered something.

Horizon had the emotion of sadness. That single emotion had returned. And in that case...

...*Why?*

“I...” she said. “I do not want to be unwanted.”

Horizon’s tears and words caused Mitotsudaira to gasp.

...*Is this...?*

She had made her best decision as an automaton, but this was a different decision that her heart wanted.

She wanted to make the best decision that said she was unneeded.

...*But being unneeded or unwanted is sad.*

Mitotsudaira understood that sadness.

...*I came here from home all on my own.*

But Horizon had no memories and little life experience. With her foundational knowledge as an automaton and what she had read in books, she had a lot of knowledge with little experience to back it up.

...*Simply feeling unwanted makes her sad.*

She was like a crying child clinging to her parent so they would turn around.

Mitotsudaira wondered if she had been the same long ago. She recalled a time when her mother had promised to go shopping with her, but her mother had been unable to find her because she was off playing. Her mother had been forced to leave without her and she had run crying after her mother.

...*That came from a desire to not be forgotten.*

It was possible what Horizon was feeling was not the same.

Incidentally, Mitotsudaira's mother had tried to pacify her by taking her to a batting center on the way back from shopping. Her mother had hit a wonderful homerun, but it had broken through the roof. Her mother had said "L-look, my daughter is apologizing too" and used her to earn forgiveness. Mitotsudaira wished there was a way to cut out the unneeded parts of one's memories.

At any rate, the silver chains seemed to be worried as they gathered around the crying automaton and used themselves to ask if she was okay. However, a few of them lacked the proper number of angles due to being wrapped around Toori.

"Are you okay?" "Okay?" "Ay?" "?"

...That last one was a bit harsh. And what is with this echo effect?

However, the main boy in question only watched Horizon as she cried. This irritated Mitotsudaira.

"Chancellor, how about you do something?"

"I-I can't move because your chains have me all wrapped up."

"Sorry," said the chains.

They released him and he gently placed his fingers on the teary cheeks of Horizon's downturned face. He brushed up his hands to wipe away the tears and she held her cheeks out toward him.

"What is it?"

He nodded and slowly whispered to her.

"A girl sheds her tears

Lean in close to console her

Look down to her boobs"

“Fight off the creepy pervert

Provide justice for us all”

On the final lines of the poem, Horizon threw a motionless uppercut at the face peering down at her. The idiot fell to a sitting position and spun around once.

Mitotsudaira watched the series of actions that played out before her eyes.

...Sh-she does not hold back!

As the idiot rolled across the sand, the silver chains lifted up the metal plate of the grill to move it out of the way and Kimi nodded twice.

“You forgot the seasonal word, foolish brother. No, I suppose you do not need one with a tanka.”

“Y-yeah, but I wasn’t expecting to get a poem in return! W-way to go, Horizon!”

Horizon responded by stretching her right arm into the air and looking down at him.

“I have been studying Masazumi’s book of traditional poetry. At any rate...”

“Let’s go on a date, Horizon.”

“I have no idea what you mean.”

Her eyes were half closed, but he gave a thumbs up, raised his eyebrows, and smiled.

“Don’t be stupid. It’s too late to say that now that you let me see you cry! Listen. You’ll go on a date with me, see all sorts of things, eat all sorts of things, have all sorts of fun, let me massage your boob-...hyan! I-I’m sorry! I got carried away, so please forgive me! Now, getting back on track, um...”

He thought for a moment.

“How about you try out this emotions thing to see if you’re interested or not?”

“And what would happen once I ‘tried it out’?”

“If you’re interested, you can try to get back the Logismoï Oplo with me. If you’re not, you can cook some food and wait for me. Either way is fine with me. You are here with us. In my mind, you are already ‘here’ and I’m sure it’s the same for everyone else. So if...if by some chance you become interested in emotions and you want to help us get them back for your own sake...” He took a breath. “We will act based on our expectations of you and you can act based on your expectations of us. Basically, if we’re both thinking about each other, all of our power will be doubled.”

“And if I am not interested?”

“Our original power should be enough. That’s normal and expecting anything more is getting greedy.”

Horizon’s eyes remained half-lidded. However...

“That is a dangerous idea. After all, you are telling me to start a world war if I want emotions.”

“Hold it right there. World domination is my thing. You think up your own idea from your parallel line. Leave all the world domination to me and seek some more enjoyable emotions on your line. And we can start it all by going on a date to see if you’re interested in emotions. What do you say?”

“You wish to carry your doll around town?”

“No.” He took her hand. “I’m going to take your hand and lead you outside.”

That comment brought a thought to Mitotsudaira’s mind.

...*Honestly.*

She gave an exasperated yet relieved sigh in her heart. But...

“You continue to mention a date, but what will we do about clothes and the date course?”

“Nate, you can choose the clothes, right? And sis and Asama can handle the course.”

“Eh!? Wh-why are you dragging me into this!?”

She thought she should be angry, but it was already too late. She heard a bitter laugh from Kimi and Masazumi spoke as if to help her out.

“Judge. I don’t exactly approve of our student council president and chancellor determining Musashi’s stance by going on a date, but it’s worth a shot if the Far East’s successor agrees.”

She clapped her hands and the high-pitched sound rang throughout the beach.

“Will Aoi continue with the same policy as the past? What does Horizon want concerning that? As we wait for those answers, I bring this meeting to a close.”

Just as she said that, someone approached from the transport ship. Everyone turned toward them and saw one of the crewmembers running their way. Adele walked out to meet the person and nodded as they spoke to her.

“Um, Vicereine Horizon?”

Adele raised a hand and walked back from the crewmember.

She tilted her head while faced with everyone’s questioning looks.

“I just received a quick report.”

She thought for about three seconds and nodded.

“It seems your Logismoï Oplo has disappeared.”

“What?”

Everyone tilted their heads and Horizon did the same.

“Come to think of it, I had a feeling it was not under my bed when I woke up today.”

“W-wait a second! Is that really something you can lose!? It isn’t, right!? Right!?”

“Of course not. Are you okay, Seijun? You haven’t gone stupid, have you?”

“H-he said! He of all people just said it!”

As everyone tried to calm her down, Horizon retained the tilt to her head and looked at those around her.

Mitotsudaira cleared her throat.

“U-um, everyone, after a short break, we will clean up here and take turns in the bath. While heading back to the ship for a change of clothes, keep your eyes open. It is not that small an object, so let us try to find it.”

She then turned toward Asama and Masazumi who had announced they would bathe together.

“As you are going first, could you hurry up and check?”

Chapter 23: Scarred Ones in a Closed Room

CHAPTER 23

"Scarred Ones in a Closed Room"



What rises up
As if emitting a scent
Even if you hide it?
Point Allocation (Sitting Politely)

What rises up

As if emitting a scent

Even if you hide it?

Point Allocation (Sitting Politely)

Tenzou sat politely in a wooden room.

The room was almost ten meters square and the walls on either side contained shelves lined with baskets. In front of him was a wooden sliding door, he sat in the changing room, and a stained glass sliding door was behind him.

The stained glass led to the bath and it was made to show Mt. Fuji.

...We planned to put this room in the transport ship, didn't we?

They had instead set it up outside because the transport ship would be abandoned and likely destroyed after Musashi left England. By building the bath outside, the local people could use it even after Musashi left.

He and Scarred had both been outside about ten minutes earlier, but Scarred was currently bathing to check over the inside of the bath.

He had planned to wait outside the whole time, but she had said it would look suspicious if someone saw him waiting outside. That was why he was now waiting in the changing room.

Scarred would call out to him when she was getting out, so he could leave ahead of her and pretend to have taken a bath.

...That is the ninja technique False Bath!

He would place hot water on his cheeks to redden them like a beautiful woman's and he would lightly dampen his hair.

“Except I always hide my face.”

In that case, I can just head out like this, concluded the ninja.

“Excuse me,” called a voice behind him.

“Wh-what is it?”

Having a naked girl call out to him for the first time in his life made Tenzou nervous.

“I checked over the floor and tub, but there is no sign of the water or air leaking out. Is there anywhere else I should check over?”

Tenzou recalled the work they had carried out that afternoon and mentally went over the instructions he had given the kobolds.

The inside of the bath had been made by placing another layer of stones over the tub and floor which had been surfaced with spells and stones. The water flowing in was also sent through a pipe to the northern wall. The pipe led to a few holes which would pour water over the people in the washing area.

There was one thing she needed to check on.

“Is the pipe sending water evenly out of the holes at the washing area?”

“Of the five holes, the two that are farthest back are weaker than the rest. There is a stopper partway down the pipe, so I can try to regulate it.”

“Please do.”

“Judge.”

Her voice contained a smile as she began working.

The girls were frowning and pressed up against the wall and door of the bathhouse.

They had initially come to see the water lily blossoms in the spring near the bathhouse. They had been discussing whether the blossoms were white or red, but their atmosphere had changed as soon as they saw Naomasa kneeling down in front of the door. She was pressed against the square glass to hear what was happening inside, but she frowned and spoke to the others.

“Kimi, Mito, Heidi, I take it you three finished cleaning up. Asamachi, were you able to detect Horizon’s Logismoi Oplo?”

“Yes. I used a detection spell usually used for mysterious disappearances, but it seems to be nearby.”

She could not tell what direction it was in, but it was not far. They had decided to begin a search later.

“It’s possible Horizon stored it somewhere while asleep and she simply doesn’t remember.”

Only those aboard the ship were going to continue searching because having unfamiliar people wandering around would only confuse matters.

“Then I’ll leave that to you. Anyway, listen up, all of you. It sounds like something interesting is about to happen in here. You know what I mean, right?”

“W-wait, Masa. Stop this. He’s our classmate.”

“C’m on, Asamachi. It’s because he’s a classmate that we can do this. Otherwise it would be illegal.”

“No, but...” mumbled Asama. “Wait. I think it’s illegal regardless.”

Asama began using the divine network via Hanami to search the sites of shrines for law gods. Naomasa ignored her and waved over Suzu who was blushing.

Suzu detected the gesture with the sensors on her waist and head. She tilted her head and approached the beckoning girl.

“Um, Suzu. That Noise Neighbor or whatever you call it can amplify voices, right?”

“Y-yes... This?”

Suzu reached for the small cylindrical terminal hanging down from the sensor on her right hip. With a quick manipulation, she pulled out a connected cord. Naomasa took it and placed the sensor against the square glass of the door.

“Oh, but this will force you to repeat everything they say. Asamachi, could you have Hanami sync with it and display it as text? It’s IZUMO-made, so you can do it, right?”

“Ehhh?” Asama frowned. “I-if they’re saying anything weird, I’m going in to stop them.”

“Judge, judge!”

Everyone nodded enthusiastically and Hanami hopped to Suzu’s head. After Hanami produced a default setting sign frame, text started to appear.

“Scarred-dono, this is rather difficult, isn’t it?”

“Oh, we’re picking up their voices!” exclaimed Adele in admiration.

Masazumi folded her arms and closed her eyes partway.

“Still, I do not approve of this.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Naomasa waved a hand dismissively. “And this is Tenzou, so I doubt anything is going to happen. He can be quite conservative.”

“Really?”

“You saw that hooded guy he was speaking with today, right? Well, that guy asked that stupid ninja about why he stopped him during the transport ship crash.” She nodded. “And, because he’s an idiot, he wouldn’t give a straight answer. Yet he even has a proper answer.”

“But...”

“As a ninja, he wants to take all failures onto himself. His combat style is to erase his own heart.” Naomasa took a breath. “That idiot refuses to give his reason because he does not want to give that guy the shame of being ignorant and not realizing the truth. While ignorance is nothing to be ashamed of, the children’s lives were on the line. Ignorance doesn’t cut it when that guy is this level’s representative. ...A ninja wears down his own body for the sake of his leader. The problem with him is he takes it beyond his combat style and into his everyday life.”

“Then,” said Suzu quietly. “Isn’t it...diffi-....tough for...the one in the hood...too? He wants to...apologize...but he isn’t...able to.”

“That’s right.” Naomasa nodded. “There’s nothing he can do while Tenzou is trying to be considerate. Then again, he must be a bit of an idiot too since he tried to run out toward the crashing ship. I think that is why Tenzou respects...no, that sounds a bit off. Well, I think he likes the guy. Tenzou understands what the guy is trying to do but can’t admit the truth because he is a ninja. He appreciates what the guy is trying to do, but I’m not sure if the Englishman will notice.”

“After how well they were getting along today, I could see Tenzou staying in England,” added Naito.

“Surely he wouldn’t go that far,” said Asama as she looked back down at Hanami’s sign frame.

The others followed suit and read the text representing the voices inside.

“How...How about further in, Scarred-dono!?”

“Ah...oh! Farther, yes! I-it’s coming out! The warmth is going all the way in!”

“Scarred-dono, reach for the front now! That should settle it down!”

“Nnn. I-it’s really hard! Ah, M-Master Tenzou! All of it is coming out now!”

“Oh, well done, Scarred-dono. I would never guess this was your first time doing this!”

Everyone exchanged a glance. Naruze had already produced a crop mark sign frame and was speedily drawing a storyboard with her pen.

“Okay! Their erotic conversation is giving me tons of progress! That cloaked man speaking to Tenzou with feminine language is reaching uncharted territory for characters in my works! I have so many ideas now!”

“W-wait. This has to be some kind of misunderstanding.”

As Asama tried to find another explanation, more text appeared.

“Th-then let’s move on, Tenzou-sama.”

“Yes. Making sure everything is working properly will prevent problems later.”

“Okay,” said Scarred in the text. “That just leaves this thick one down below and the rear penetration.”

“What in the world are you doing!?”

As Tenzou sat politely in the bathhouse, the sliding door directly in front of him suddenly opened, revealing Asama with her eyebrows raised.

The sudden action and Asama’s attitude surprised him.

...Eh!? Ehh!? I don’t know what’s going in, but should I apologize?

After all, they had been about to test the thick pipe leading to the bath lower down and to check and make sure none of the water was penetrating the seal at

the rear of the bath. Scarred seemed to have noticed the situation because he heard her hide in the bath. Meanwhile, Asama still did not understand the situation and she frowned when she saw him sitting on the floor.

“Huh? ...Why are you here, Tenzou-kun?”

“Eh!? What!? Am I an unwanted ninja!?”

“No, that isn’t what I meant. Oh, Hanami, you can continue searching the site ‘Castration for Minor Crimes’. ...Anyway, why are you here?”

Tenzou suddenly realized what she meant. He and Scarred were supposed to be in the bath together.

“Have you not taken your bath yet?”

“W-well, um...”

He frantically gave a vague answer, but that turned out to be a mistake. Asama sighed.

“I do not know what is going on here, but let me take a guess. You were too afraid to take a bath with someone else, so you were sitting out here putting on a one-man play of your perverted fantasies, weren’t you!?”

...Ehhhhhh!? I-I mean, a few perverted things – just a few! – may have gone through my head, but that would happen to anyone in this situation. But still...

“Honestly,” said Asama as she seemed to stretch her body forward to look toward the bath. That action and her curiosity were bad enough, but Tenzou caught sight of a Technohexen and some other girls crouching down and peering in from the darkness behind Asama. He decided to settle this here and now.

“N-no need to come in! I am simply inspecting the floor here. Scarred-dono is performing the inspection in the bath.”

“Um, Tenzou-kun? We can look over the floor here afterwards, so please hurry up and take your bath. An inspection with a purification spell will find any flaws,

so I will tell you later if there is anything wrong. ...Everyone is waiting out in the cold and we cannot wait in here before you two finish changing.”

...You certainly showed no restraint in coming in just now.

He decided he needed to pretend to take a bath, but Asama gave one final half-lidded comment while closing the sliding door.

“Oh, and Tenzou-kun? After living in the transport ship for so long...um... How can I put this gently? You smell like a dog, so go take a bath.”

“Nwoh! That was hardly gentle!”

She ignored his protest and closed the door.

He heard the sound of the door shutting.

...What do I do now?

1: Take a bath with Scarred, thus making her hate you. ← Making a well-endowed blonde hate me would be the greatest disgrace of my life.

2: Do not take a bath, thus making the other girls hate you. ← They’re a bunch of monsters, so who really cares?

3: Peep on the bath without taking one, thus making Scarred and the other girls hate you. ← How did I even think up this one?

...Basing it on who I have known the longest, I would be the answer, but all of our girls are of the cement type, so maybe 2 would be the way to go. I have a feeling that would achieve the most damage control.

But then Asama cracked open the door and glared at him.

“You still haven’t gone in?”

“Th-that’s really scary, Asama-dono! Are you an overprotective mother!?”

“Just hurry it up.”

The door closed again and he heard whispering from outside.

“Eh? What? So it was all Tenzou putting on a one-man play? Why isn’t he part of one of the literature clubs!?”

“Personally, I think he has been rejected so many times his fantasy engine has reached warship-class.”

“P-poor...T-Tenzou-kun...”

...Was that the three-hit combo of misunderstanding, assumption, and pity?

But there had to be as many variations as there were people there, so he tried to think positively and assume having them speak about him like this was a victory.

But then...

“Um, Master Tenzou?”

He heard Scarred speaking from the bath.

“What is it?” he asked while turning her way.

“I do not mind, so...please come take a bath.”

“...”

For an instant, he considered using the “quick disrobe” or “jumping disrobe” ninja techniques developed for disguises.

“N-no. I-I-I-I... Th-that...”

He realized he had already failed by growing flustered like that. But...

“You don’t want to...?”

“Of course I do!”

For some reason, he reflexively and proudly answered.

“Then...feel free to come in.”

There was nothing he could say in response to that, so he collapsed sideways to the floor.

The bath was large. Of the 30 square meter space, about 10 was taken up by the tub.

It was simply constructed. The tub and floor had been constructed directly on the ground and a pre-made room had been placed on top with the floor removed. For the construction of the foundation and the hardening of the floor, they had used the same spells and quick-acting materials that were used to build the residential districts on Musashi. The material used to fill the gap between the foundation and the walls was still drying, but it was holding up well enough.

The tub had a large stone sticking up from the bottom to alter the flow of water and to give people something to lean up against. Scarred currently had her right shoulder leaning up against it.

The stained glass door depicting the Far East's sacred mountain opened and the ninja entered.

The ninja had a towel wrapped around his waist.

“Master Tenzou, I see you did not remove your hat and scarf.”

“That is because I am a ninja.”

The real deal really is something else, thought Scarred while feeling a little impressed.

However, he avoided looking at her and began washing his body at the washing area.

“Oh, this stopper...”

“I already checked that.”

“Th-then what about this pipe?”

“I checked that on your instructions as well.”

“Umm, th-then what about...”

“I checked it all. Your instructions were very good.”

She could tell he was trying to be considerate.

...But this is no big deal.

With that thought, Scarred watched the ninja as he let the water wash over him from the pipe above. He held his hands together and muttered some kind of sutra, so she guessed it was a type of mental focus ritual.

“How about you do that after warming up in the bath?”

“I suppose I could do that, but...”

“Do you not want to take a bath with me?”

...That wording should get through to him.

He did indeed tilt his head and groan, but she decided to avoid using that kind of wording in the future.

He approached the tub, said “excuse me”, placed his towel on the edge of the tub, and quickly submerged himself up to the shoulders.

“Ahh...”

The way he let out a relaxed sigh seemed to be the Far East method, so Scarred moved next to him, turned her back to him, stepped into the tub, and placed her towel on the edge of the tub.

“Nn...”

“Wah! Scarred-dono, what are you doing!?”

“Eh? But this is Far East etiquette, right? I will make sure to teach the village children about it. And I hope you can teach me a lot more, too.”

Tenzou lowered his head.

“Um...”

“What is it?”

“This situation is...indecent.”

Oh, my, thought Scarred with an inward smile.

This ninja had moved resolutely and quickly enough to cut in and stop her as the transport ship crashed, he had acted on an intention to keep the children unharmed, he had moved the graveyard and constructed the bath, and he had even given tips on improving their farm land.

...I can't believe someone like him would get embarrassed.

As someone who always hid her identity, for better or for worse, being treated this way was a new experience for her. She felt he was quite diligent, but she decided not to tease him about it.

“There is nothing worth seeing here,” she said.

“O-on the contrary! There is an entire genre for it!”

He suddenly spoke very passionately, but she did not know what he meant.

“Genre?” she asked before speaking the words in her heart. “My body is covered in scars, so it is not worth looking at.”

“That is...not true.”

“Is that because of the...genre you mentioned?”

“No.” The ninja shook his head. “Your scars are...I apologize, but as far as I can see, they are only on the front of your body.”

He then stopped speaking.

...It can't be.

A mixture of unease and hope filled her heart, so she spoke to him.

“Please...continue.”

“Judge,” he replied, but he hesitated a while longer before speaking. “I may be wrong, but it appears a lot your scars were gained during a single event and the others were gained with gaps of time between. As an outsider, I do not intend to inquire what it was that caused them, but I can say one thing for sure.”

She listened to him.

“You have never once turned your back and fled. You have always faced your opponent and your opponents understood and appreciated that fact.”

In which case...

“Speaking ill of those scars is an insult to both your opponents and to yourself.”

“ ... ”

Scarred gasped. She recalled when she had gained those scars. She went over what had happened and what she had thought.

...Is he right?

Part of her wanted to agree, but the reverse side of her intent to punish herself produced a question.

“You could say I gave myself these scars because I wanted to. I felt I might as well die.”

“Then...”

The ninja named Tenzou faced her.

“If you gave yourself those scars and are still alive...”

“Then I should live on and accomplish something? Are you saying fate is telling me that? That would just be deceiving myself.”

“No,” he said. “I was saying you could continue doing so until you are satisfied.”

But...

“But I feel you have done enough. After all...”

Part of Scarred wanted to hear what he was going to say, but part of her did not.

He was definitely going to speak about her. She had not told him much about her, but she would still feel disappointed if he said something that showed he did not know what he was talking about.

...He chooses to live a life where he remains on the losing side.

She was jealous of his ability to be satisfied with that.

And so she spoke up as if taking a step forward.

“After all?”

Her resolute question received an immediate response.

“I do not think you need any new scars. If you wish to have pride in the scars on the front of your body, you should not add on more scars. You should maintain your current body with the proud scars on the front and the untouched back which proves you never faltered. Adding any more scars would only damage the pride

you and everyone else have. This may be presumptuous of me, but I think you have done enough.”

And...

“I think you have done well to continually protect so much.”

Tenzou’s words had contained a hint of admiration.

...This girl...

The girl with the Urban Name of Scarred had likely been an excellent leader. He did not know why she now used “judge”, the response of a criminal, but he knew one thing without knowing her identity.

...She is a good person. And she is the type to walk a life filled with negative things.

He had seen her scolding the village children. Scolding held the risk of making the children wary of you or angry at you, but she had made sure each child knew what exactly they had done wrong and then forgave them.

...She left them with the memory of being scolded and the memory of improving themselves.

But that was likely why she had gained those scars. And she was hiding her identity as if to make sure no one could tell her they had changed their ways. In that case...

...Someone, it doesn’t matter who, needs to be her ally.

He turned toward her and saw her lower lip was a bit tense.

“...”

Her eyebrows wavered and a tear suddenly fell down.

...Eh?

As she suddenly cried, lowered her head, and covered her face with her scar-covered hands, Tenzou panicked.

“No, um.... Did I do something wrong?”

But as Scarred covered her face, her arms squeezed her breasts together and Tenzou instinctually looked down. As he saw the distortion and change to the physical shape caused by the pressure, he prioritized saving the image in his brain.

...I am being terribly indecent!

As the phrase “Now I’ve done it!” repeated in his head while accompanied by alarm bells, he chanted a Mikkyou sutra and managed to take back control from the evil thoughts.

“U-um, Scarred-dono?”

He called out to her, but Scarred continued to lower her head and cover her face with her hands. Her only response was to shake her head a bit.

...I have no idea what to do! I should have studied those porn games more.

While trying to keep everything below Scarred’s neck out of vision, he stared into empty air and thought. The first thing that came to mind was a fragment of an article from the ninja magazine Monthly Cannabis Jump.

—Immediately tell a joke.

...I can’t afford to tell a terrible joke like Masazumi-dono! In that case...!

“Okay, Scarerd-dono. Um...To change the subject...”

As he spoke, he recalled the title of the article had been “The Stereotypical Patterns of Unpopular Ninja”. *I guess my life is over now*, he thought while somehow finding it easier to speak now that he knew that.

“Well, you see... All of my scars are on the back because I am always running away.”

He sat back down next to Scarred and raised his right arm. That arm had a scar on the front.

“This is a rare example of a scar on the front, but I got this while Musashi was stopped at Edo. A monster appeared due to a disturbance in the ley lines down below. Anyway, I went out to face it as a part of my training, but it turned out to be a monkey that understood human language. As soon as I faced it, it shouted ‘monkey magic’ and attacked. I assumed it was using some kind of spell, but it simply scratched at me. Anyway, the monkey was captured and sent to the monkey mountain in Ueno. Because that is on the god of Ueno’s land, the monkey was probably at least partially cut.”

He looked over and saw Scarred’s shoulders shaking while she continued to cover her face. He drew back, assuming she was angry. But...

“Honestly.”

She raised her head and faced him with eyes and face wet from the tears and steam and with a smile on her flushed cheeks. However, the ends of her eyebrows were lowered.

“I really do not understand you.”

...That would be my line!

Then again, if he did not understand her, it was only natural that she would not understand him. But he was relieved that she did not seem to hate him.

...No. I mustn’t interpret this in a way convenient for me. I always end up losing something when I do that.

After telling himself that, he spoke to her.

“I will get out first. I will hold off the others outside, so use that time to get dressed.”

“Y-you make it sound like holding them off will be difficult.”

“Judge,” he agreed. “If only they could be...”

He started to say “more like you”, but stopped because he felt that comparison was rude. He started to leave the tub, but instead scratched at his head and thought.

...Oh, no. If I would so readily use her as a comparison, I must be focusing on her a lot.

As Tenzou began to leave the tub, Scarred quickly looked away from his naked body. As she did, she spotted something floating in the tub.

Wondering if it was trash, she looked closer and saw it was a scrap of reinforced wood. She wondered what it was doing here, but she quickly stated her answer as a question.

...Part of the transport ship's outer hull?

The bow of the ship had been smashed during the crash and the water in the bath had come from a hole in the crust opened on the edge of the inlet.

...A piece that fell in the hole in the crust must have floated up with the water.

She knew why it was here, but its presence still counted as a failure on her and Tenzou's part as the ones performing the final check. And so she reached toward it.

“ ... ”

But the fragment gave her an odd, dull pain.

...Eh? Why does it hurt?

She had not touched a sharp corner or edge. She had only reached for what looked like the painted surface.

Nevertheless, she felt a pain like something was being jammed below her fingernail or scraped across the bottom of her finger, so she jerked her hand back. Tenzou seemed to notice as he left the bath.

“What is it?” he asked.

However, he considerately did not turn around.

“Nothing,” she quickly answered.

With slight doubt in her mind, she reached for the floating fragment once more.

...It can't be...

She felt as if she had found the answer to the mystery that had been filling her mind for so long.

...Why did he say it was his own carelessness that led him to stop me during the crash?

Why had he insisted he had not noticed her spell when he had to have noticed?

“...”

She carefully reached out and touched the fragment. The palm of her hand felt as if a mass of needles was pressing against it but not breaking the skin. She knew what this pain meant.

...It is resisting my ether control.

The wood had been treated to oppose spells. Specifically, it would repel them. In order to protect the ship, it had been given the ability to repel any external power. However, it was rare for even warships to have this spell applied to all of its

armor. The costs were too great, so spells would normally only be used to defend certain points.

But she quickly realized why this spell had been applied to the transport ship's outer hull.

...Because it is Musashi's transport ship.

Not only that, but it was a high-level transport ship that Musashi was willing to use even during battle. The repel spell had created an outer shell that protected the ship from wind resistance and the inertia applied during quick actions.

...In that case...

If she had tried to save the children by using her spell to blow away the crashing transport ship, the spell might have blown the ship away, but the repelled power would have struck the children with her spell.

“...!”

Even in the warm water of the bath, Scarred felt a definite chill.

...If that's true...!

Why had he rushed in to stop her?

And why was he refusing to tell her the truth and insisting he had not noticed her spell?

She had solved the first question, but she had to guess at the second.

...If Master Tenzou had told me the truth...

Scarred's speculation brought her to something close to certainty.

...Everyone would learn that I ignorantly and hastily rushed in.

Part of her wished he had told her and did not want to feel that ignorance was something to be ashamed of. But if the people learned her ignorance could expose them to danger, they would lose their trust in her. Also, this situation was very out of the ordinary and the children had been safe in the end. He had likely decided that there was no need to tell the truth and have the people lose faith in her.

What was she to the residents of the fourth level? She could not answer that question in a way that was not conceited or self-deprecating, but he had seen through it all in the instant he saw her spell and he had taken action to keep that shame from her.

He had lied and said it was his own carelessness and he had not blamed her of anything despite her ignorance.

...He did not just protect the children. He protected me, too.

“ ... ”

How much easier would it have been if he had simply let her apologize? After all, even though she understood the truth now, he would still not admit the truth because he understood her position.

And on top of that, she spotted something else he had done.

He had a wound on his back, near his right shoulder blade. It had a complex shape and it appeared to have gouged out his flesh as it stabbed in. The flesh below could be seen through the new skin growing above.

She remembered that wound. He had gained that while protecting her.

And so...

“Master Tenzou.”

She stood up, scraped her waist along the tub, and approached his back.

Tenzou gasped as he placed his hands on the edge of the tub and suddenly felt wet skin press against him. Her skin felt cold at first, but he felt a wet and sticky warmth as she pressed up against him.

...Boobs!! No, stop thinking about this like Kimi-dono would. You need to focus on analyzing and recording the-...no, stop thinking about such indecent things. Just calm down and chant a sutra!! But...

“Master Tenzou.”

“Wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-what?”

...I am hopeless. I should just roll over and die.

Just as he came to that simple conclusion, he felt a damp wetness on the right side of his back. After a moment, the sensation vanished and she spoke.

“Where did you get this injury?”

...She would feel ashamed if I told her truth.

“I-I was attacked by a talking dog the other day.”

He heard her laugh, but she did not move away.

“Would you mind if I healed it? Or does it need to be healed with a different spell?”

Tenzou recalled Scarred’s spell ability. Her healing spell could likely heal that shallow wound without leaving a scar.

...But that would erase the sign that I protected her. Such cheap heroism.

But from her point of view, the wound may have been nothing but a burden.

...How does Toori-dono feel when he sees Horizon-dono as an automaton? Then again, he peeks between her legs when she crouches down and wants to touch her

breasts, so maybe he is satisfied like this. He may be looking at things in the long run.

And so he made up his mind.

“Please do.”

“Judge.”

As she spoke, her bangs touched his back and he felt a small damp sensation. Before he realized that was her lips, she had passed her arms under his arms.

“Please do not turn around. It would interfere with the spell.”

Tenzou poured all his energy into mentally chanting sutras and the healing was complete in a few minutes.

After Tenzou and Scarred exited the bath with a slight delay between the two, some other people entered the bath.

“First of the vanguard in the bath!”

Adele dashed full speed into the bath with her glasses removed.

“Ah... Don’t run,” warned Suzu as she followed her in.

Adele slipped, flipped around, and unintentionally dove into the tub, causing a huge splash.

Next, the rest of the girls entered with exasperated looks. Two of them with black hair exchanged a glance. The taller one, Asama, spoke to Masazumi.

“Okay, let’s begin.”

She nodded along with Hanami on her shoulder.

“Masazumi, it’s time to make a Mouse contract and get it all set up.”

Chapter 24: Guide to a New World

CHAPTER 24

"Guide to a New World"



If something is convenient
But you stop just before reaching it
Is it inconvenient?

Point Allocation (Unease)

If something is convenient

But you stop just before reaching it

Is it inconvenient?

Point Allocation (Unease)

“Now, let’s get started. Come over here, Masazumi. Everyone else, we will be borrowing the area of the tub near the tap.”

Asama moved toward the edge of the tub on the northern end of the bath and Masazumi unsteadily followed.

Masazumi copied how Asama had her towel on her shoulder and her long hair on top of that, but she was still self-conscious about her body. It did not help that she was comparing herself to Asama. She watched the other girl from a bit behind.

...She really is big.

She meant her height. Asama was as tall as Naomasa and the Aoi sister. Mitotsudaira was somewhere in between and Masazumi was shorter still.

...Is this what it would be like to have an older sister?

As she was made painfully aware of what she lacked, she watched Asama check on the tamagushi and charm she had placed in a bucket. The other girl then came to a stop.

“Okay, we can do it here. Um, to prepare...”

Asama picked up the Shirasago-made tamagushi with her right hand, held it up to her forehead, and chanted something. She then spread out the tamagushi with a snap of the wrist, knelt down in the tub, and placed the tamagushi’s paper decoration in the water.

The light paper decoration sank into the water without resistance and Asama narrowed her eyes as she watched the water soak into it. As if crawling up the tamagushi, small firefly-like jewels of light and something resembling a vine wrapped around it.

“Eh?” exclaimed Asama.

“What is it?”

“Nothing really. It’s just that there should be some filth in the bath after two people bathed in it. But...what is this? Not only is there no filth, but it seems to have been sublimed to a level greater than my purification. Either Tenzou-kun or that Scarred person must have used a sublimation spell rather than a Shinto purification spell. Tenzou-kun is as filthy as the rest of our class, so I assume it was Scarred-san. How strange.”

As light clung to the tamagushi, Asama removed it from the water and brought it to herself.

Starting from the tip, the tamagushi was rapidly dyed in the color pink.

“H-huh? What? Wh-why is there so much impurity in me!?”

“Your wicked thoughts were at full swing back when Crossunite and Scarred were bathing. By the way, what kind of impurity does pink signify?”

“Um, well...”

Asama suddenly looked to the side where Hanami was looking at a sign frame.

The title of the frame read “Impurity Meter (Personal Use)”.

“Um...Hanami? Who...uh...is that for?”

When Hanami noticed Asama, she turned around, frantically hid the sign frame behind her back, and shook her head back and forth.

“Th-th-th-th-this is nothing. Nothing at all. C-clap!”

“No, wait, Hanami. Is that what I think it is?”

Asama’s eyebrows rose slightly as she smiled and tried to peek behind Hanami. The Mouse turned around in an instant and broke the sign frame with a karate chop. She then started clapping her hands above her head to avoid the issue.

“C-clap! Clap!”

“That Mouse is quite well made,” muttered Masazumi.

Asama’s head drooped a bit and nodded, but she recovered after a few seconds.

“Okay, time for a new contract. I have a quota to fill, so I need to focus and do my best.”

That last comment worried Masazumi, but the other girl’s different-colored eyes were looking firmly at her.

“Please sit on the floor here.”

She laid out a meter long piece of thin paper that was shaped like a human’s upper body. It was Japanese paper with visible fibers, but the bathwater did not soak into it. Assuming it was used for spells, Masazumi sat down and Asama fixed her hair. As she did, she removed the towel.

“I will be pouring water on you, so please sit still.”

As soon as Masazumi closed her eyes, hot water poured over her. It soaked through her hair, and poured over her scalp, neck, and shoulders. The warm caress of the water brought a sense of calm. As she sat with her eyes closed and her straightened back to Asama, she was reminded of the past.

...My parents would wash me like this when I took baths with them long ago.

She wondered what her father was doing now.

Even though it was nighttime, around a dozen carriages were stopped in front of a mansion on Musashi's surface. It belonged to Konishi, a wealthy merchant. The drivers were gathered around a fire in a waiting area inside the mansion while their masters were drinking aged wine in a parlor further inside.

"Okay, tonight's viewing party will cover the episodes of Transforming Musician Peterman we have been recording since it began in April. The only advance information we have is that it is a 'giant hero' series following the previous series and his special attack is the Petrification Beam."

"Judge. We have had so many meetings over the past month or so that we haven't had a chance to watch any of it! Avoiding any information on the divine network was really hard, Nobu-tan!"

"Yes, Koni-tan. We have both experienced the same joy and suffering in this journey. I hope this is the beginning of an excellent series."

"Judge. I know what you mean. To distract yourself from the loneliness of Masazumi-kun's absence, you have become all the more diligent. Is that why my delivery department has been visiting your place a lot more often?"

"Judge. I normally have things sent to somewhere other than my home, but simply going around to the different delivery locations keeps me from getting home. Lately, I have grown fond of loading offerings into the storehouse before meetings."

As everyone nodded in agreement, someone hesitantly raised his hand.

"Um... I actually watched a recording of the first two episodes with my kid."

The others raised their wineglasses, crossed their legs, and adjusted their positions on the sofa.

"Merely stay silent. If you spoil anything, we will force you out of the committee and the market! After all, you can only ever watch a show for the first time once! Nothing is better than preserving that innocence!"

They all took a sip of their wine.

“Glory to our new meetings and partings, and glory to Vice President Honda Masazumi who we adore in secret!”

“My father is probably having a serious meeting right about now.”

“He does seem like the serious type.”

“Judge. ...Ever since the Mikawa incident, I think he has been working to change how he views me. But I sometimes think he’s been trying too hard lately.”

“May I ask why?”

“Judge.” Masazumi recalled what had happened before the transport ship crash and began to speak with an exasperated tone. “He just seems really restless whenever we’re home together. And there have been a few times when he suggested things like seeing an anime movie as father and daughter because he got some tickets from Konishi. He’s clearly trying to build a closer relationship, but wanting to see ‘Las Casas, Protector of the Indians’ is a bit much. Does he think I’m a little kid?”

“He is probably having trouble deciding how to approach a child.”

More water was poured on Masazumi. This action had been repeated several times now and she could tell Hanami was using a sign frame nearby.

“Oh, Masazumi. I am cancelling your contract with Mikawa. Mikawa shrine disappeared when Nagoya Castle went boom. A new shrine is being built aboard Musashi, but the former shrine would interfere with this contract if the previous contract remained in effect. That is why I am cancelling that contract before transferring you to a contract for our shrine on Musashi.”

“Will my contract with the god of my birthplace remain?”

“Mikawa’s birthplace deity works with Asama Shrine, so you can keep that contract. Your contract will be with the same god, but you will be using us as a point of contact since your previous one disappeared with Mikawa. You did make a resident contract at our shrine when you came to Musashi, but you received weak divine protection because you retained your birth contract with the birthplace deity of Mikawa and did not own a handheld.”

“This is complicated...”

“Yes, it is,” replied Asama with a bitter laugh. “The free divine protection of a birthplace contract provides support for your entire body via the parts on your neck, sides, and waist. You did make a resident contract with the Asama Shrine here on Musashi and that provides support for life on Musashi which travels through the sky, but that support was weakened in you due to interference from Mikawa. That may be why you are always about to starve to death.”

“Oh, so I might stop collapsing on the roadside now?”

She thought she felt everyone glance over at her, but she decided to assume it was her imagination.

“Anyway, this is a major contract, so we will throw in the Asama Special of sunblock and dry skin protection for free. You must meet with important people in your position, so that certainly can’t hurt.”

“I don’t really worry about that very much, but I guess that just leaves...”

“Yes. You have completed your contract for the protection of your birthplace god and resident god. In other words, the god of your birthplace and the god of the land you currently live in. They do not actually have names because local deities are simple nature gods. Now, before moving on to the Mouse contract, you can make an individual contract with a god you want to worship. Will you?”

“Is there a reason to do that before the Mouse contract?”

“Personal contracts are made with powerful named gods and spells and the like can be acquired via the shrine in charge of that god. However, that god will

usually have a Mouse specific to them, so it is recommended to make the personal contract ahead of time. After all, a Mouse is usually modelled after a god's messenger, so they are a symbol of that god.

“But you only have a birthplace and resident contract. Those are usually made with nameless local deities that do not have their own Mouse. If you do make a personal contract first, you can later choose a Mouse specialized to that god's abilities.”

“So not only are there nameless local deities, but there are also named gods one can make a personal contract with?”

“Yes,” replied Asama. “In the Far East, gods are a part of nature and they reside in the land. The earthly gods reside in the Divine States which are governed by the environmental gods that became local deities. On the other hand, the heavenly gods reside in the heavens.”

When the gods had abandoned the planet due to the worsening environment, it had been the environmental gods who had normalized the environment based on instructions left by the gods. But their overly strong definition of “normal” led them to go overboard in creating an environmental balance. When the people had returned from the heavens, they had only been able to descend to the Far East which the environmental gods had left relatively safe. Afterwards, the harmonic world had been created and the people had started the Harmonic Unification War.

“The gods and mankind managed to calm the environmental gods who were doing *too good* a job, but we're still essentially renting space here, aren't we?”

“The environmental gods were absorbed into the ley lines, so you could say they and the world are now one and the same. Rather than saying they do not have names, it would be more accurate to say they are on too great a scale to have names.”

“I see.”

Hanami then showed Masazumi the sign frame. It showed a site that let one search for a god. It had lists of gods in order of name, ability, sex, court rank, ancestors, and more.

However...



“What is with these aggressive categories in the genre search? ‘Loves crossdressing’, ‘peels back the skin’, ‘an older sister is fine too!’, ‘cruel’, ‘crotch splitting’, ‘quick to prostrate’, and ‘always running errands’?”

“There really are gods like that. Shinto is great with genres.”

It sounds more like it just tries to pander to everyone, thought Masazumi. Anyway, what should I do?

Hanami opened another sign frame which displayed gods related to negotiations and politics.

...There are a lot of Amaterasu-types here, but they're too over-the-top for me. Oh, the God Mosaic is on the list of popular techniques.

“Would it be possible to eventually make another contract for this?”

“Oh, of course. ...Just make sure to do it with me.”

The corner of Masazumi's mouth stiffened when she saw Asama's smile, but Naruze began adding to her storyboard in the bath.

“And while naked, Asama says to Masazumi, ‘Just make sure to do it with me.’ Okay, the next chapter is going to be great!”

“Ga-chan, I think you just drew up five years' worth of storyboards.”

Would the student council's approval rating drop if I wrote up a bill cracking down on doujinshi events? wondered Masazumi with a half-lidded glare.

But then Asama spoke up.

“Well, we can scold her plenty later. ...So, um, you can make a personal contract at a later date, but those gods usually have specialized Mice. If you already have another Mouse, the shift can be inconvenient, so keep that in mind. ...Anyway,

what will you do? Do you want a personal contract? Um...Are you sure it wouldn't make you feel better to make one?"

"Why did that last part sound like you were trying to sell me something?"

"Don't worry about it." Asama smiled and held out a hand to stop her. "For now, would you like to use a generic Mouse as a substitute? A generic Mouse is ranked lower than one under direct control of a god. Their abilities are not specialized, so they may be unable to draw out the full ability of the god you ultimately make an individual contract with. And given your job and status, it would need pseudo-shock absorption, so even a generic Mouse can cost a fair bit."

"You can't make it any cheaper? I'm worried about after I graduate."

"Okay," said Asama while smiling more than necessary. "In that case, we can keep the cost down with a heavenly blessing contract."

"A heavenly blessing contract?" asked Masazumi.

"Yes."

Asama showed her the wooden charm in her hand. She pressed in on a few of the characters written on the thirty centimeter oak board and the characters began to emit a bluish-white light.

"Your Mouse is determined randomly. A choice contract is expensive because searching for a Mouse that meets your requirements takes some effort. In some cases, a request has to be made for a new Mouse to be created via the union of two existing Mice."

"Is it really okay to decide randomly?"

"It usually produces a dog, rat, fox, or bird as there are large numbers of them. A heavenly blessing contract is inexpensive, but it can produce a powerful Mouse or one that would otherwise be quite expensive. ...Oh, just press here."

Asama handed her the charm. At the bottom was a super-deformed shrine maiden face with the words “press here” below it. Masazumi placed her finger on it, worried about the state of the Shinto religion, and pressed it.

She handed the charm back to Asama who turned around. Beyond her swaying black hair, Asama used the end of the charm to draw a square on the floor.

“Clap.”

Hanami clapped her hands and a glowing box suddenly grew from the ground in front of Asama.

“Oh?”

As everyone in the bath watched on, a charm invoice could be seen on the surface of the glowing one meter square box. It said “To: Honda Masazumi-sama via Asama Tomo-sama. Contents: Mouse. By: God.” Without bothering to read it, Asama tore off the ether seal and it vanished into thin air.

She focused on opening the top of the box and peering inside.

“Oh?” She nodded twice. “Oh, oh?”

“Why do you look so impressed, Asama?”

“Oh, um...” muttered Asama as she circled around to the other side of the box.

The light from below really emphasizes her breasts, thought Masazumi, half in exasperation, as she watched Asama place her hands on the box.

“I have a question for you: what kind of Mouse has arrived?”

“How am I supposed to know?”

“Then I will give you a hint. Um... It is not a symbol, an inorganic object, a plant, or a person. It is an animal.”

“A fox?”

“Wrong. Have another hint. It begins with a vowel in Far Eastern.”

Masazumi’s first thought was “Is it a dog?” And in the next instant...

...Is it a dog!?

She had often wanted to own a dog. She liked cats too, but cats had a way of not settling down and making her feel lonely with all empty rooms in her house. A lot of her classmates had owned dogs to prepare them for strange phenomena and to frighten away criminals. She had often seen the dogs being taken for walks on leashes or sitting by their owners in the park. Her general thoughts at those times had been the following:

...How nice.

Okay. Masazumi nodded. Bring on a dog. In M.H.R.R., they would call it a Hund. I think it will be small enough to ride on my shoulder, but a puppy is delightful in its own way.

She swung up her right fist.

“Okay, Asama! Open it!”

“As you wish.” Asama lifted up the box and brought out the Mouse. “Tah dah! It’s a giant anteater!”

“What kind of scam is this!?”

Masazumi saw a mother and a child anteater that were too big to have fit inside the box. The mother was almost two meters long and the small child was clinging to her back.

“Right, right.” Asama looked down at the two. “IZUMO has been working in Kyushu and the New World recently, so they have been creating Mice for people there. Also, having many different types available helps the shrines respond to many different situations and increase the survival rate. Dogs, cats, rats, and

foxes are popular, but there are situations they cannot handle. If they were the only ones, they would be wiped out.”

“Sure, but...an anteater?”

“Oh, it eats special food made from ether, not ants, so don’t worry. It can go inside the hard point pocket on the neck of your clothes.”

“But...”

Just as she was going to continue complaining, she saw the mother anteater cry as it tore its child from it and moved away. While still shedding tears, the mother waved its front right paw and disappeared. The child anteater looked absolutely grief-stricken now that it had been left behind.

Everyone began whispering as the child anteater lay on the ground, cried, and trembled.

“Poor thing. If Masazumi doesn’t take it in now, she belongs in the ‘cruel’ genre.”

“Is it just me, or are a lot of politicians cold-hearted people?”

“Masa...zumi... H-how...about it?”

...I have to take it in to keep my approval rating from dropping!!

Masazumi approached the twenty centimeter anteater and tried to place her hands under its front legs to pick it up, but it merely trembled in her hands.

“...!”

“Wah!” she shouted in surprise as it flailed its legs and tail, but she did not let go. “Are you-...”

Before she could say “okay”, the child anteater rolled up into a ball. Instead of curling its tail around itself, it seemed to hide its face and legs inside its own tail. Masazumi now had a trembling ball of fur in her hands.

...What am I supposed to do?

Asama picked up on her thoughts and lowered the ends of her eyebrows.

“Um... It seems you received one that is a bit too young.”

“What should I do?”

“You can only wait for it to get used to you. But it cannot perform its job as a Mouse like this, so I can arrange another Mouse for you.”

“Well...” muttered Masazumi.

She could feel it trembling in her hands. With the shock-absorption setting, she would likely have been unable to feel that slight movements of the animal’s heat and fur.

...But this isn’t about feeling sorry for it.

“Okay.” Masazumi nodded. “It isn’t actually running away. It’s just afraid of the unfamiliar outside world. Once that fear goes away, it should do fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Judge.”

Masazumi gave her judgment. She placed the child anteater in a nearby bucket while it continued to curl up as if trying to hide inside itself.

“Asama, is that all?”

Masazumi’s decision produced a sigh of relief from the others in the bath. Naomasa wiped her face with the towel folded up on her head while leaning her left elbow against a stone in the tub.

“Ha ha. Now you have a kid, Masazumi. Not too long ago, you wanted to be a father, so this is a good change.”

“Uuh...”

Masazumi blushed and everyone else smiled bitterly. Meanwhile, Suzu laughed while leaning against the wall on one end of the tub. Just like Masazumi, scarlet tinged her face.

“This is fun,” she muttered quietly. “Everything has been...more fun...since Horizon...came back.”

She sighed and relaxed her body.

“This is fun...”

She leaned to the side and collapsed onto Adele.

“H-huh? Suzu-san!? W-wait!”

Adele held Suzu up, but Suzu had already passed out. Adele frantically held her up so she would not sink.

“U-um, everyone! Everyone! Suzu-san is...”

Suzu slid down in Adele’s arms but then stopped. Adele frowned at this fact.

“...bigger than me!? Sh-shit...no, I mustn’t swear! Um, Suzu-san, I’ll be lifting you... Wow! I can hook my arm under her breasts! Shit...no, I mustn’t swear. At any rate, I’ve lost! Am I in our class’s lowest caste!? Does failure taste like milk!?”

“Um... Are you trying to say Suzu-san spent too much time in the bath and passed out? Please calm down, Adele.”

Asama entered the tub while having Hanami use a stimulant spell. Adele turned toward her, but her vision was not great without her glasses.

“Ah! Instead of a stretcher, you brought some lovely cushions! Okay, let’s place Suzu-san on top!”

A carelessly outstretched hand grabbed onto Asama’s “chest armor” and knocked her over.

Asama gave her diagnosis of Suzu who had been carried to the beach.

“She has a slight fever. She was heated by the yakiniku fire and then the hot spring, so it is not surprising her body temperature rose a bit. She is delicate, after all.”

“Wait... Then why is everyone else perfectly fine?” asked Adele.

As the other girls hung their heads down, Suzu was asked if she would leave the diplomatic ship and return to Musashi, but she said she wanted to do her job as diplomat. Even on Musashi, everyone would be busy in the coming days and the coming and going of the transport ships would make everything noisy, so England’s first level had been chosen as a peaceful place for her.

Adele and Futayo would go along as her bodyguards.

“Listen up, Bell-san. If they say anything inconvenient or you want to force some kind of demand, just start coughing.”

“I-is that really...okay?”

She received plenty of advice like that. The next day, the three of them took their luggage and travelled to London. The day after that, preparations for the joint spring festival began.

Suzu’s health recovered on the second day of preparations and she began her work as diplomat along with Futayo and Adele in the guest building of Oxford Academy’s central school building group.

Her first job was nothing more than handing Jonson, England's diplomat in charge, the data gathered by Heidi, but the English group was curious and cautious of Suzu and her two bodyguards who had combat styles useful in battle. The English students in charge of looking after her observed Suzu's attitude and demeanor to make sure they did not intrude on her lifestyle.

The preparations lasted four days plus one day off. Musashi's presence alongside England's third and fourth levels produced excess food consumption over that extended period and the ship's location meant it primarily affected England's middle class.

On the night of the fifth day, when festival preparations truly came to an end, large-scale celebrations were held in various places. The following day, the joint spring festival finally began with a combined announcement from Masazumi and Dudley.

After the opening ceremony on the second level, the residents of both nations were allowed to come and go between the two nations and the cultural exchange of the festival began.

Below the clear sky, carriages travelled about and the area grew filled with people, music, dancing, and flowers blowing in the wind.

The week-long festival had finally begun.

In the transport ship, Horizon's Logismo Oplo had yet to be found. It could still be detected "nearby" and the search continued.

However, the festival had begun and Toori had challenged Horizon to a date so he could decide on a stance. Also, the others attempted to watch on from a distance.

Many different people moved throughout the festival.

And among them...

"My moment has finally come. I just hope my books made it to the event site."

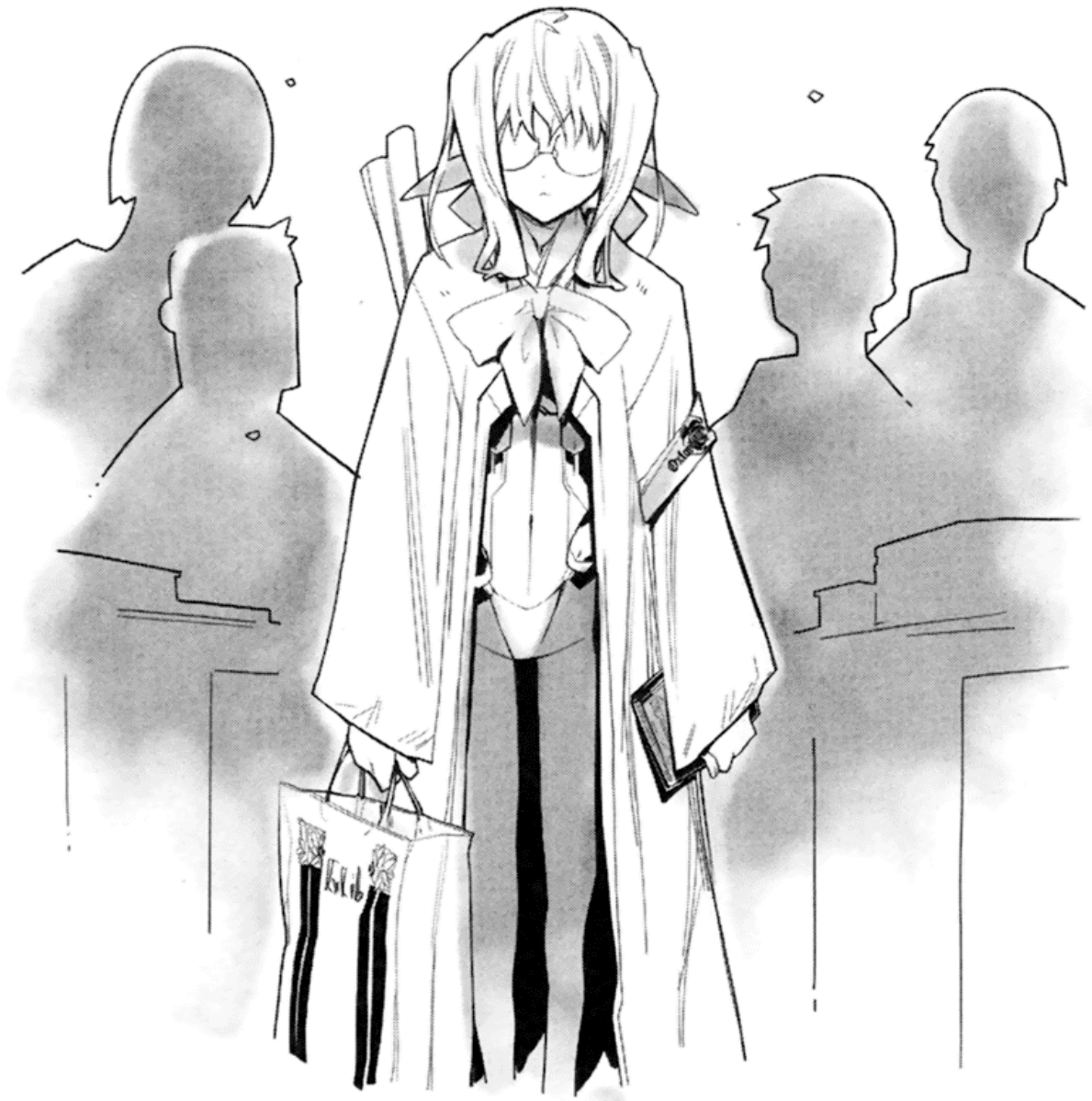
Neshinbara looked up at his bandaged right arm as he held it in the air and he walked with a splint on his leg.

Unlike the others, he had arrived on a standard transport ship as if he were a normal person.

Chapter 25: Ruler of the Theatre

CHAPTER 25

"Ruler of the Theatre"



What are the odds
Of an uninvited guest showing up?
Point Allocation (Feeling of Distance)

What are the odds

Of an uninvited guest showing up?

Point Allocation (Feeling of Distance)

London covered a large portion of the southern side of England's second level. The Thames River was the primary waterway and the city was divided into a few different sections.

The festival was held on the main streets, parades were held daily, and food stands had been set up. And on the side streets, local stands and stores provided food, dancing, and music.

Due to the history recreation, London was divided into two major sections: the northeast section known as the City which handled things such as trade and the southwestern section known as Westminster which contained the political and religious facilities. Between the two sections was the royal family's hunting ground known as Soho. The areas of Soho bordering the two sections contained a lot of residential land.

The festival was centered on a plaza in Soho and a lot of the surrounding buildings (especially trade warehouses on the City side) were being used for events.

Some warehouses were used for business with Musashi. Some were used to store festival stands and supplies for groups taking part in the festival. Others were used to sell local crops or as dining halls to serve them.

One warehouse to the south displayed the logo of ArchsArt, England's representative corporation, and the number 16. It was 100 meters long and 50 meters wide, and it contained countless long tables arranged to sell printed books.

It was a convention for selling self-published materials.

The wooden building had the tall roof common to warehouses and it was filled with people. The convention inside was known as the “Incomparably Esteemed Doujinshi-Lovers Club” which the signs abbreviated to “IncEst Club”. This abbreviation concerned some people, did not bother some others in the slightest, and caused a few to accuse the convention runners of false advertising.

The area was very crowded and the only gaps existed in the enclosed area created by the creator’s tables and the snack spots in the corners. It was easy to control the lines by the walls, so a balance between guidance and crowd concentration had been achieved. The lines extended outside, so ventilation was not a problem.

However, there was one area by the wall that had no line or crowd.

The long tables usually had two sellers at them, but the tables by the wall were made for major sellers and thus had only one to a table. This allocation made it clear that a certain seller had no line.

That seller was Neshinbara.

His printed book was placed on the table and he had a decorative fisherman’s flag bearing the circle name “Missed Fish”.

But no customers approached. With half-lidded eyes, Neshinbara sat in his chair and watched the surrounding sellers gradually work through their lines.

While standing in line, people with similar tastes would exchange information and discuss their hobbies. Common topics of discussion were artists with inherited names, those artists’ works, and fan works based on those works.

“As a flat-lover, should I go for Muromachi Room’s new work ‘Flat Chronicles: Volume 20’ first? Or should I go for a new awakening with ‘Non-Flat Chronicles’ from the original author, Imagawa Sadayo?”[\[6\]](#)

“I know I’ve got to get my hands on ‘A Basara Farewell!’^[7] that is supposed to bring an end to the popularity of writing about the Nanboku-cho period. Something new is going to overthrow it.”

“You know Geoffrey Chaucer’s short game collection ‘Canterbury Tales’ that follows multiple occupations, right? What number is it up to now? I tried playing ‘Final Canterbury Quest’ for the next-gen console, but it just confused me when it started with ‘Occupation: Slime – Job: Sticky Liquid’.”

Everyone was speaking cheerfully about things like that. Beyond them was another line for those receiving a light crucifixion as punishment for cutting in line or running through the crowded convention center. The men running that wore a mask and no shirt.

“Okay, the end of the line is back there,” one of them said. “Please form a straight line. It will be over soon enough, okay? You’ll just feel a slight stabbing sensation, so raise your hand if it hur- Run and I’ll drive this scorching stake into you!!”

That area was quite lively.

...European execution grounds always stink of burnt flesh.

Neshinbara occasionally spotted a familiar face passing by and they would raise a hand in greeting so as not to disturb the lines on either side. Neshinbara would stand up and begin raising his right hand.

“ ... ”

And then raise his left hand which was not wrapped in bandages with spells written on them. The other person would soon lower their hand and walk off to their next destination.

The convention would continue throughout the festival period with novel sales, comic sales, video sales, etc., but any one seller could only stay for one day. The popular works would be sold across the Far East through the Far East Academy

Stores, but they would only have so many in stock. Any passionate fans wanted to line up and get their copy as quickly as possible.

And if they were seeking and attempting to acquire what they believed in, the buyers were the main character in their relationship with the work in question.

The high spirits of these main characters would continue even after returning home and speaking with others. It would not leave until the next work was released.

The roof of the building could open and it was opened just slightly, so the morning sun and wind had a way in. Even so, the light had difficulty reaching the walls and the lines to Neshinbara's left and right blocked the light out like canyon walls.

But as noon slowly approached, the thin line of light rose above the people's heads. Only then did it finally fall on the floor in front of Neshinbara.

The light should have illuminated a deserted canyon floor, but it was not deserted.

Someone stood there.

The girl wore England's girls uniform with the skirt and sleeves removed, but she did wear a kinked white coat over it. She wore thick glasses with the sides placed over her long ears, she wore a backpack, and she held a novel and a paper bag.

"Thomas Shakespeare."

A stir ran through the people forming the canyon walls. They turned curious eyes in her direction, but no one was able to utter an actual comment.

...Is this what you call awe?

They were curious. They could not look away. They turned their ears toward her to hear any words spoken.

But they were afraid of saying something and having that curiosity turned back on them. More importantly, if anything they said would simply be ignored...

...Then they might as well say nothing.

But...

“Hamlet!”

A girl suddenly ran out from the line to the right.

With a theatre pamphlet in hand, a girl ran from the line and toward Shakespeare. A woman who seemed to be the girl’s mother frantically walked out of the line after her.

Neshinbara glanced to the right and saw the line was for something titled “Gothic Hamlet Drawings: Costume Pattern Collection”. It was an art book containing costume patterns and design drawings. Different corporations used different interpretations to mass produce clothing with spells and machines, but families in areas with poor distribution were forced to make their own school uniforms based on patterns. That culture had spread to the cities as a way of creating one’s own fashion. This allowed people to wear clothes from the same era as the main characters of the novels and plays in the Testament descriptions.

...That’s a luxury only possible with the Testament.

Hamlet was one of Shakespeare’s four great tragedies. Its official title was “The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark”. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, took revenge against his uncle who killed his father and stole the throne and his mother, but he ultimately lost the woman Ophelia who had feelings for him and both killed and was killed by the young man Laertes who could have become his friend. He died after asking his friend to pass the story on to the people. Hamlet feigned madness and faced evil with evil but lost so very much. He was popular with both men and women, but there was another difference between the girl and mother standing in the center of the canyon.

“Even with the generation gap, they both accept the contents of the play.”

Wanting to wear the costumes from the play most likely meant they wanted to become a part of the play.

It was no different from putting on makeup and becoming the ideal version of oneself.

...That means Hamlet lets some people become an ideal version of themselves.

Macbeth in Neshinbara's right hand throbbed.

This is so much trouble, he thought while Shakespeare stopped and let the girl face her.

The girl held the pamphlet out toward Shakespeare.

“This!”

Neshinbara thought the girl would ask for Shakespeare's autograph, but she said something else.

“It's yours!”

For an instant, Neshinbara did not understand what the girl meant.

But it slowly dawned on him.

...Dammit!

That one word appeared in the bottom of his gut.

He understood what the girl was trying to say to Shakespeare.

...Everything she saw, heard, felt, and learned in Hamlet belongs to Shakespeare.

The pamphlet was just the physical form of her memories. She could hold it in her hands and she wanted to express her feelings to the author now that she saw that author.

“Stop that,” said the mother as she frantically ran over, but Shakespeare stared blankly for a moment before responding.

“Testament.” She crouched down to put herself on eye level with the girl. “Thank you, little Ophelia.”

“No. I’m Hamlet!”

“Is that so?”

“Testament.”

“What is your name?” asked Shakespeare with a smile to the girl.

“Ophelia!”

From behind the girl, the mother looked up into the sky to feign ignorance.

“I see.”

Realizing the situation, Shakespeare held her hand over the pamphlet. She muttered something under her breath and fragments of light scattered from her paper bag and into the air. And something was created in place of that scattering light.

“Wow...”

Writing appeared on the surface of the pamphlet in the girl’s hand.

The girl had her back to Neshinbara, but he could see the pamphlet over her shoulder as she held it up. Shakespeare had not written her signature with that spell. A new name had been written next to the title of Hamlet.

“ ‘Ophelia’. Perhaps those two can continue being together one day. ...And with that in mind, have this passage from Hamlet: ‘costly thy habit as thy purse can buy’. Do exactly that, girl.”

“Testament!”

With a word of thanks, the girl showed her prize to her mother. From his position, Neshinbara could only see the mother’s bowing back, but he doubted her expression was a bad one.

Shakespeare stood up and slowly turned toward the line to the right. She then spoke to a student midway through the line.

“Could you let this lady and her child in? After all, she did not hesitate to leave the line when her child ran out. I think it is only fair to let her back in.”

Not a word was spoken in response.

“...”

But a space was opened in the line and let the girl and mother in with a bow. Shakespeare lowered her head toward all of them.

“You have my thanks.”

“Don’t worry about it,” muttered someone. It was likely a Musashi resident who did not know Shakespeare very well. “The worst thing to do to a child is give them a bad memory.”

Someone from England spoke next.

“After growing up, you really want to give them good memories.”

“Yeah,” replied someone who could have been from either place. “Ha ha. We at least succeeded on one side of that!”

“Yes,” agreed everyone as the girl and her mother sank into the line.

“Thanks!”

It was unclear who that comment was directed at, so Shakespeare and everyone else responded with either “testament” or “judge”.

Someone then began to move. Shakespeare turned toward Neshinbara and began walking toward him once more.

Her smile vanished and she silently stood before the full pile of books on the long table in front of him.

“Is the seat next to you free?” she finally asked.

Neshinbara had expected her to ask about his book, so he was unsure how to respond.

“Eh? Oh, um...”

“It is, isn’t it?”

A stir ran through the surrounding crowd as she pushed aside the long desk to walk behind it and arrived at his right side. She sat in an empty chair that had been prepared but no one was using.

But...

...Why would you come over here just to read a novel?

She buried her face in the novel she held and began reading.

The stir in the crowd finally vanished. The only movements were the gentle flow of the surrounding lines and the mother and child bowing both to Shakespeare and those in the line after buying what they had lined up for.

That was the only point at which Shakespeare looked up from her book.

“ ... ”

She nodded and bowed her head a bit. After that, only silence and motionless remained.

As he felt the pressure of that silence, Neshinbara had a question about this foreign name-inheritor.

...Why is she even here?

The bandages around his right hand and the lack of sales for his book were both her fault. Then again, if one took his earlier criticism of her works as the initial cause, this could be viewed as her revenge.

“...Eh?”

The next thing he knew, she had finished reading her book and begun flipping through the one he had written. The book contained a small short story and a literary criticism. Specifically, self criticism.

“W-wait a second!”

She ignored him. She was completely immersed in reading it, but he did not feel that was because of the quality of his writing. After all, her reading style led her to read anything this way. If he physically took the book from her, he was sure she would counterattack using the curse.

...Dammit!

He could not interfere. As he endured the joyous stirring of the writing in his right arm brought on by the proximity of its master, Neshinbara waited for the half-lived girl to finish reading the book he had written and place it on the table. And he cut in before she could pull a new book from her paper bag.

“Why are you here?” he asked.

She did not even turn toward him as she answered.

“I see you are still creating things like this.”

“W-well...”

“Are you trying to say you would have written something else if you had written this after confronting me?”

It was possible. It annoyed him that he could not deny her influence on him, but he decided saying nothing would be best. He sat back down in his seat, folded his arms, and faced forward.

“I would appreciate it if you continued doing that.”

“Doing what?”

“Please do not look at me.”

It irked him all the more because she was not looking toward him. But if they were ignoring each other like that, was there any meaning in exchanging words?

Is this a new form of harassment, wondered Neshinbara with a sigh.

“Yes, that is for the best. After all, you cannot act with Macbeth in effect.”

Her words bothered Neshinbara, so he responded while still facing forward.

“Why do you say it’s for the best that I can’t act?”

“A lot is going to happen, but it is for the best that you stay like this,” said Shakespeare. “Let us discuss many things.”

We can discuss all sorts of things today, thought Scarred in a wheat field.

In the distance to the north, the third level looked like a towering wall made of earth and stone. The second level could similarly be seen even further away. The

sounds of fireworks and low rumble of the people and music resounded in her body even more than the ocean waves.

Meanwhile, Tenzou spoke from directly in front of her while looking at the ears of wheat.

“Hm. You have planted a few different varieties, but I see no problem from a soil standpoint. The Far Eastern style of condensed planting should be possible. If you include legumes, you can grow multiple crops per year.”

“In the European style, the wheat is not simply sown in tilled land. Small ridges like this are made and the seeds are buried inside them. It protects the seeds and makes maintenance and harvesting easier, right?”

“Judge. It takes a fair bit of effort, so it is a decision you must make.” He stood up and turned toward her. “During a crop shortage or when you need the income, it is good to provide the possibility for those willing to put in the effort. Oh, but you should at least redo the waterway.” He indicated a few points on the land.

“The current waterway passes over a mostly dirt crust, so the water seeps underground. You should redo it along the line from somewhere near the field – like where that tree is over there – and to that rocky area on the other side. Over the past few days, I laid out some cloth at night to check, and it seems there is bedrock below that line. The water will not seep underground much and any that escapes will flow into the fields on either side. Also, using that line will help when a village is created at the base of the mountain.”

“Judge,” replied Scarred, but it was a sign of admiration rather than agreement.

She saw Tenzou stretch and let out a sigh because their inspection for the day was complete.

...Honestly, he works so much.

Over the past few days, he had prepared for the spring school festival, helped her in the early mornings, and exchanged ideas with the local people. He had interesting and unique methods for treating crop diseases, searching for water, and other things. Scarred felt his presence was quite significant. In England,

people would resolve those problems by listening to the voices of spirits, but not many people could use spirit techniques. The methods were less certain, but anyone could use Tenzou's methods. That meant a lot.

According to him, his agricultural knowledge was so he could get along with the locals while on a spy mission. She had laughed when she had heard that.

...He is completely unaware that his current actions are no different from getting along with the locals to spy on them.

Pointing it out would sound like she was suspicious of him, so she had said nothing. She had felt bad for laughing, so she had made a portable lunch for him whenever he went off to prepare for the school festival. When she had seen the box after he returned on the first day, it had been clear others had swiped some of the food, so she had given him even more on the subsequent days.

And this was the first day of the festival.

He was taking a break on the festival's first day, so they had been together since morning. The water lilies in the spring by the hot spring had begun to blossom, so they had eaten lunch there and stayed afterwards.

Tomorrow, he intended to spend the morning running messages and checking on supplies at the festival. Once the festival began for the day, he planned to take morning and afternoon shifts. He would spend the week doing that.

...And then he will leave.

She would no longer be able to see him.

Despite her thoughts, he folded his arms as he looked at the surrounding fields.

“Wheat is fine, but I think you can grow some even better crops. Growing rice as they do elsewhere would be perfect, but England has no provisional rule over Far Eastern land and setting up paddies takes a lot of work.”

“Judge. We couldn’t do that even if we wanted to. It requires altering the land on too large a scale.”

Scarred wished they could talk about other things, but time continued on and she could not think of anything to talk about.

“I am sure you have noticed, but England’s crust is almost directly below the ground, so growing wheat quickly leaves the land barren. That is why we need to grow other crops like legumes to bring back the land’s fertility. The practice of growing legumes like clovers to improve the land has been spreading to various areas, but it isn’t quite enough. The spirits like to play around and assist the improvement when they find a four-leafed clover, though. It would be nice if we could grow potatoes which can grow even in land with low fertility, but there is that story about the Fairy Queen saying potatoes are poisonous. That is why IZUMO has been working on breeding a poisonous potato for killing rats. They are calling it the Potato Smasher.”

“I heard they tried to create one that exploded five seconds after being pulled from the ground, but the project was scrapped after the experimental field was destroyed by a chain reaction of explosions. If only the troubles we cause other nations could remain more subdued. For one thing, that isn’t even about poison anymore. At any rate, it seems the Fairy Queen’s rule is not all good.”

“Oh, my. Saying that kind of thing around here can get you arrested for treason.”

“Judge. My apologies.”

As soon as Tenzou spoke, he heard the sound of a bell. It came from far off in the north.

“That sounds like an academy’s bell. What bell is it?”

“Judge. That is the bell in the Tower of London’s chapel,” slowly replied Scarred. “That is the sign of Double Bloody Mary’s...that is, Mary Stuart’s weekly appearance. She simply looks outside from the viewing platform of one of the towers.”

She looked to the north where clouds filled the sky.

“If the armada battle is to begin in a week’s time, she will probably only make one or two more appearances. Once the sounds of the festival vanish from London, it will be time for her execution.”

“Her execution?”

“Judge,” said Scarred. “Master Tenzou...”

She suddenly asked him a question.

“What do you think about the execution of Double Bloody Mary?”

Scarred listened to the ninja answer her question.

“Well...”

He often began a response that way when he wanted to think about it first. She waited a while longer and he finally gave an answer.

“As a ninja, I cannot say anything about a decision that someone like you has made.”

“Then...”

She tried to ask if he approved of the execution, but he let out a quiet breath and continued speaking.

“I am a ninja after all.”

Hearing that, she finally caught on. He was saying that this was not what he actually thought. But no matter what he thought, he could not reject the decision of someone in a higher position than him. And so he said even more.

“Y-you call it an execution, but some other method has been prepared as an interpretation, correct?”

Scarred focused on the fact that he had asked the question more than the question itself.

...He is hoping it will work out somehow or another.

And what did that mean his true thoughts were? Scarred thought on that fact for a moment.

“Judge,” she said. “An interpretation is being used to make the execution a means of saving Mary Stuart.”

“Judge. That is good...”

Before he could say “to hear”, he stopped and scratched at his head.

“My apologies. I said too much.”

“It’s fine,” she said with a smile.

She appreciated it. She was thankful that he felt that way and she was thankful and glad to have this time with him.

“ ... ”

She heard fireworks in the distance.

As noon approached, the festival arrived at its first peak.

Chapter 26: Flower Presenter on the Street

CHAPTER 26

"Flower Presenter on the Street"



In what season
Does the strictness of blooming
Become more lax?
Point Allocation (Cheering)

In what season

Does the strictness of blooming

Become more lax?

Point Allocation (Cheering)

The sounds of the festival danced about the stone and brick city. They gathered together and spread out in the midday sky.

The city was not all that tall. Instead of apartments, the streets were lined with stone and brick houses.

But the dirt roads and roofed sidewalk arcades were all filled with people.

The road could not be seen through the people who were all heading to different destinations or the temptations before their eyes.

The people made countless different noises. Orchestras and bands played and sung the main melody, the countless speaking voices of the walking people formed the low bass, and their footsteps on the stone and dirt created the drum-like tempo. The many sounds and never-ending flow of people drifted toward the fatty, flavorful, and sweet scents of foods at the festival stands. They were further disturbed by the jester and magician shows, but no matter how much the movements slowed, they never came to a complete stop.

And on top of all that movement, spirits moved along the road and through the air.

The wind spirits carried voice messages, the kobolds carried materials to support the festival, and they all remained in constant motion.

All the never-ending action produced heat, but one factor gave them all a breather.

The girls.

There were the Far Eastern residents. A few girls – mostly Far Easterners – were dressed up as they walked down the center of the road. A tall girl with light brown hair and lots of exposed skin took the lead. She was followed by a tall black-haired girl, a silver-haired half-werewolf, and girls with black and gold wings.

The waves of people naturally parted ahead of them, but not to avoid them. Both the men and women wanted to move back so they could more easily see the entire group.

The parting waves of people began hesitantly, grew surprised, and finally filled with breaths of curiosity. The occasional person made a comment while drawing back.

“Are those the girls of Musashi?”

A lot of Far Eastern girls had entered England for the festival. However...

“Those are chancellor’s officers and students with connections to the student council. They’re the main players during combat.”

Of all the gazes turned toward the girls, not all of them were filled with curiosity. Some of the people had body types that pointed toward certain combat styles or wore stockers for spell charms. Those people parted the waves of people and poked their heads out to observe the girls who might become their opponents.

Their gazes held suspicion or doubt and they commented on the girls’ gait, posture, and shoulder movements.

“We can’t let our guard down.”

“Testament. They’re more impressive in real life than in the footage from the Battle of Mikawa.”

“Their breasts are?”

“Their heights are.”

“Testament. I just had to ask. It was a joke, okay? Don’t take it seriously? Okay?”

“If you say so.”

After a short pause, one of them lowered his head.

“Sorry...I lied. I shouldn’t do that. I shouldn’t lie about the important things.”

“No, I’m sorry. I lied too. It’s just that I’m more of an ass man, so I didn’t want to give in.”

“I see.”

Some of the guys in the crowd smiled at each other and placed a hand on each other’s shoulders, but an occasional guy would exit the crowd to invite one of the girls to join him. They were mostly high school aged and some were closer to middle-aged, but they would all start by standing in front of the girls.

“_____”

The dancer’s smile and comment from the girl in front would put a bitter smile on their face as they looked up into the sky.

That exchange happened a few times, but suddenly something else happened.

“_____?”

The boy who exited from the valley of people was younger than all the previous ones. He was still middle school aged. His blushing face was filled with tension, but he still stood before the girls.

But his lips trembled as he tried to speak and he was unable to form the words.

“...!”

The boy bent his right elbow and held it out toward the dancer at the front. He was asking her to take his arm.

The entire surrounding crowd gulped at the action.

“_____”

And then they either laughed lightly or gave sympathetic sighs at what was coming.

Their reactions caused the boy to blush an even deeper shade of red and hang his head.

But with a light laugh, some hair flew through the air. The hair spread out like a cloud filled with wind and then it danced about. The sudden action caused the surrounding people to fall silent.

“_____”

The girl in the lead removed one of the ribbons in her hair and wrapped it around the boy's arm. She gently but surely tied the decoration to his proffered elbow.

She then lightly tapped his elbow. It was a rejection and a sign for him to return to everyone else. He looked at the cloth wrapped around his arm, looked at her, and then nodded.

“_____!”

He swung his elbow up to show everyone.

“...!!”

And the crowd welcomed the boy back with cheers and applause.

As she watched the boy be swallowed up by the crowd, the dancer spread her arms slightly and bowed lightly toward them all. A few people cheered and she calmly began walking once more. Once she did, the crowd parted before her.

As they walked, the black-haired girl second from the lead glared at the dancer and asked her a question.

“What was that strange ritual just now, Kimi?”

Kimi did not turn around as she walked in the lead. She merely left behind the words to answer the question.

“It’s simple, Asama. England’s self-proclaimed gentry are challenging the summit’s flower which was discovered in the Battle of Mikawa.”

Asama listened to Kimi while watching out for the kobolds that occasionally cut across the road.

“But they are taking me too lightly. After all, they are all inviting me by saying ‘how about you come with me’ or something similar. I don’t like it. They make such a casual invitation for protection in case I refuse. If I do and people laugh at them, they can laugh it off as if it were a joke from the beginning. Why would I accept an invitation like that? That is why I tell them other guys would be joining us as well.”

“Then what about that boy just now?”

“Ha ha,” she laughed quietly. “He silently held out his arm as if to say ‘come with me’. It was forcefully, but it did a nice job of making me to pass judgment. He was not the same as the others. He was seriously asking me if he was good enough. I could not respond so lightly to him. He had the right attitude.”

“Then why did you give him the ribbon?”

Kimi responded immediately.

“That’s simple. I can’t let him mistakenly think that dressing up nicely and being forceful is enough to win acceptance from a girl. He had the right attitude, but he still lacked quite a bit. There is also looks, strength, other obligations, his

finances, his job, etc. There were still a lot of unknowns. I have no intention of being satisfied by a boy like that. I am sure he will pick another flower one day, but he still has a long way to go before that day comes. But that outstretched arm was not a mistake, so I rewarded him with one of my ribbons to tell him that.”

“Does my brain still have a long way to go? Because that sounds like the reasoning of a drunk to me.”

“If a woman cannot grow drunk on herself how can she intoxicate others with her presence?”

“Um.” Asama lightly waved her hands back and forth. “I’ve never actually been drunk.”

This produced whispers from Naito and Mitotsudaira behind her.

“Doesn’t Asamachi train with sacred sake every day?”

“I thought the shrine banned her from drinking when she started used it as a substitution. Wasn’t that during middle school?”

...First my chest and now my liver. I feel like it is always body-related jokes with me.

She felt her height was the same, but then Kimi’s hair waved back and forth in front of her.

“I have also been deflecting the ones after you, so you should be thankful.”

“Eh? ...Ehh?”

She had not expected that. For some reason, the word “indecent” entered her mind and heat filled her cheeks. She frantically spoke up now that she knew her safety was in the hands of the deviant walking before her.

“U-um, m-make sure you reject all of them, okay?”

“Judge, judge. I am not foolish enough to let any impurities approach Musashi’s main cannon shrine maiden. That would cause trouble for my foolish brother and the others. Just leave it to me. I can speak English.”

“You can?”

“Judge,” answered Kimi. “Knowing the words ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘eros’, and ‘dance’ is enough to hold a conversation.”

“Wh-who let this idiot take the lead!? Oh, I’m so glad I realized this now!”

“It doesn’t matter. Just like on the Far Eastern mainland, a translation spell is in effect on England, so there won’t be any problems. More importantly...”

Kimi turned toward them. She looked at Mitotsudaira, Naruze, and Naito.

“Has anything changed in our search for my foolish brother and Horizon?”

“By the way, where are Seijun and Masa-yan?” asked Naito.

“Masazumi went to a used book sale in Westminster. Masa said something about working with the engine division to repair the Musashi and collect parts for Jizuri Suzaku,” explained Asama. “We will meet up with Masazumi in the park on Oxford Street which runs between Soho and the City. Toori-kun and Horizon will meet us there as well.”

Kimi nodded.

“Heh heh heh. Not much further and we can spy on my foolish brother and Horizon’s date. We are only a slight mistake away from being stalkers, but that kind of twisted concern is so lovely! If Suzu could join us, we could use her sensors to listen in! Let’s eavesdrop! ...This would be a lot easier with a ninja. Did that ninja say he is checking on the experimental wheat field with that hooded gentleman?”

“Judge,” said Naito. “Once the festival is over, Tenzou will be leaving England with Musashi, so he probably wants to do as much as possible while he can.”

“Probably,” agreed Asama, but then she turned toward Naruze. “Naruze, you don’t have to sell your printed books like Neshinbara-kun is?”

“You don’t have to avoid calling them doujinshi, you know? Anyway, this event is being held every day this week and our section isn’t until the fifth day. I’ll be taking part again with a different section on the seventh day, though. Neshinbara wrote a novel, so he’s today. Speaking of which, he’ll probably have some trouble. With Shakespeare...” Naruze held up her right arm. “And the whole Macbeth issue, I doubt anyone will want to approach him.”

“What was the name of that Tres Españan academy for young children? The 13th Mutsugoirei Academy?”

“Heh heh heh. If you are going to look into people’s pasts, keep it to the ones you have fallen for, gossiping shrine maiden,” said Kimi. “Whether one’s past has a major impact or not, even incidents in one’s past that leave no memory are part of the environment that shapes them. In that case, learning someone’s past is the same as wishing to live in the same way as them. Understand?”

“Understand what?”

“Shakespeare said she and Neshinbara have the same past. ...As a girl, don’t you hope for an adorable future there?”

“You make it sound like you hope for love even from stalkers.”

“What’s wrong with that? If we were not all protected by the law, everything we did would be a crime. So let us enjoy ourselves like criminals in this land with different laws. ...Mitotsudaira, what are you looking at?”

In response to Kimi’s question, Mitotsudaira looked to the right.

“There is a park over there.”

The others only had to look. The park beyond the crowd was a square patch of land thirty meters long. It was likely a local gathering spot. A simple bazaar had naturally been set up there, but there was another gathering as well.

“The Landsknechte are recruiting warriors.”

The Landsknechte were a combat club in M.H.R.R. which had been created for the history recreation. They were modelled off of the Kriegs Georgern and its members belonged to academies in M.H.R.R.

...But in exchange for money, they will fight for any nation as transfer students.

They essentially ignored the national borders.

The world was based around students and the academies disliked the idea of “soldiers”, but the Landsknechte acted outside of the academies. That allowed them to use the history recreation as an excuse to refer to themselves as mercenaries.

Usually, the Landsknechte leader and his close aides would travel to different places while maintaining a supply unit for food and a canteen run by prostitutes. In lands at war, they would recruit soldiers, join the fight, and continue fighting if necessary.

“You sometimes see them in the reservations. For the Far Eastern people to fight in a war to defend the nation with provisional rule over them, they must become transfer students using the mercenary system.”

The unit in the park already had a supply unit which was running festival stands.

They were aided by women whose clothes bore the chicken and squirrel emblems indicating a prostitute. Those women also lined up small items to sell.

This is a wonderfully lively atmosphere, thought Mitotsudaira.

“But they are dying out now that every nation has their own army for the Thirty Years’ War.”

“That is still in its early stages, so they are still quite busy,” said Naruze from behind her.

Mitotsudaira regretted saying they were dying out in front of Naruze and Naito who were from M.H.R.R., but Naruze was looking in the same direction.

“M.H.R.R. does not have a combined national army due to the increasing decentralization of the principalities, so a mercenary organization that is not bound by the principality borders is very useful. Even if the principalities fight, the mercenaries can be united via money if a crisis falls over M.H.R.R.

“Anyone can join, but a chivalrous desire to protect something lies at the base of it all. Their opponent is decided by money, but that means they always have a path that can never be destroyed. Before a battle, the Landsknechte kneel on the ground and kiss the earth. That may be a sign of their desire for a united empire that is impossible with the current divided principalities.”

Before their eyes, men lined up in the park and the leaders accepted them.

A spear with their recruitment charter or “Bat Brief” attached was set up at the park entrance. Next to it, the recruitment commander tried to convince people to join while a hired band played as loudly as they could manage.

In the park, the people were divided between the candidates awaiting inspection and those whose inspection was complete.

And something existed between the two groups.

“That is the Landsknechte’s famous gate of inspection known as the Spear Gate.”

Two spears stood a meter apart with the butt end down. The upwards-pointing tips had a pike lying between them. The makeshift inspection gate used the spell cast on the spears and pike to determine the characteristics of whoever passed through it. Mitotsudaira was fairly certain the spears were from M.H.R.R.’s Eisenritter brand which ensured durability and sharpness with the thickness of the spears. The pike on the other hand was a straight and long weapon from the Holy Knights’ Steel Association brand.

...That means the mercenaries do not distinguish between Catholic and Protestant.

Supply officers stood to either side of the gate. A secretary stood beyond the gate to record the surname, baptismal name, and birthplace of those who passed through. Occasionally, the inspection gate would emit a chime and the person passing through would begin a discussion with the supply officers.

“You’re an idol worshiper, aren’t you? What? Your closet is filled with holy figurines? Most of your unit is Protestant, so be careful. ...Fine then. Our warrior’s compassion will allow you to carry one with you, but just this once.”

It was unclear whether that was actually kind or not, but it seemed warriors handled this sort of thing in a roundabout fashion.

“Why are the Landsknechte recruiting here in England?” asked Asama with a tilt of her head.

“Well, Asama,” said Naruze. “This recruitment is for those in England who aren’t students. The academy rules say only a student can oppose other students. And anyone who joins the Landsknechte temporarily joins the M.H.R.R. academy of AHRRS. That means they are a student, so they can join England as a transfer student and freely protect England from Tres España. It’s a convenient method for those who quit being students for some reason or another.”

“Hashiba is not opposing England, so you can also view it as a way to earn some points here.”

As they spoke, the recruitment commander began performing an oath with those who had passed through the Spear gate.

“Listen up! As Landsknechte, you will abide by the AHRRS academy rules and the 74 Landsknechte regulations of duty! First, when marching, ‘Give your all, Always stay the pace, and Yearn to continue on’. Remember those rules of G-A-Y, and you’ll do fine! Next, to ensure a balanced diet with your provisions...”

As they all nodded at the basic stipulations, they held their right hand and two fingers up toward the commander and gave their oath.

“I swear it on the Testament.”

The girls of Musashi sweated nervously as they listened to the stipulations and oath.

“No running in the halls, keeping a balanced diet, and flattening their milk cartons? Th-that is quite a strict oath.”

“You eat nothing but meat, so you need to add water and bread to balance out your diet.”

“Kimi, I think you would be kicked out the instant they performed a uniform or hairstyle inspection.”

As they all watched the mercenaries, Naruze spoke up.

“Of course, I think Tres España is doing the same thing with the Kriegs Georgern who are the Landsknechte’s rival and the organization they are modelled off of. The Kriegs Georgern are pro-Catholic, so they are on good terms with K.P.A. Italia. Due to his position, the pope cannot own a private fighting force, so he has the Kriegs Georgern protect him. The Landsknechte are more numerous while the Kriegs Georgern are more disciplined, so it’s hard to say how this will turn out.”

“...You know a lot about this.”

“I suppose I do,” she said, but she said nothing more about herself. She instead steered the conversation back toward the mercenaries. “The prostitutes running the canteen are succubi, right? They can give men any dream they want. Any painful memories or farewells in their past can be redone with that power. It’s said that any guy will find themselves crying when they wake up. And the skilled ones can apparently make anyone call her ‘mother’.”

“I see,” said Mitotsudaira. She then had a thought concerning that dream-giving ability. “What would you think if the chancellor wanted to resolve his regrets in that way?”

Her casual comment caused Asama to turn around. She had a surprised look on her face.

“Um...”

Hearing the shrine maiden hesitate, Mitotsudaira belatedly realized her question had been inappropriate.

...I seem to be lacking in prudence today.

She decided to change the subject, but Kimi asked her a question before she could.

“Mitotsudaira, do you still have my foolish brother’s trail?”

“Eh?”

Mitotsudaira immediately restated her response.

...Oops.

“Judge. He is up ahead on this road. His hair smells the same as yours.”

“You’re pretty amazing, Mito-tsan.”

“The chancellor and Horizon wash their hair with the same shampoo and Kimi has been taking care of Horizon’s hair every night recently.”

“True.” Kimi had her back to them, but Mitotsudaira heard her laugh. “Just my foolish brother was fun enough, but now I have a little sister who is as cute as a doll and I can touch her with my own hands. My life is trending upwards so much that every day sets a new high score. Just think about it: there is an idiot who is

trying to conquer the world and a cement-like girl who actually has the authority to do so...and I am their older sister. So who will hold the highest position in the future? That would be me, wouldn't it?"

How is anyone supposed to mentally defeat this girl? wondered Mitotsudaira, but Kimi brush up her hair with a laugh and continued speaking.

"So if I do not keep a level head, the entire world will go crazy."

"Are you saying you are a balancer for the world?"

...Even Kimi had to have been surprised when Horizon suddenly appeared. Probably. Maybe. If there is even the tiniest bit of normalness in her.

Mitotsudaira had also not known what to do about that reunion of old friends after ten years, learning that old friend had lost her memories, and learning that she was a Logismo Oplo automaton. Mitotsudaira had not known how to react to that girl or if she should simply leave things be and see what happened.

...Either way, I would be leaving it to the chancellor.

Mitotsudaira was grateful that Horizon had approached her during the yakiniku the night before. After all, it had taught her that Horizon was not wary of her. Now she just had to figure out what to do about it.

At any rate, she thought before speaking to the others.

"If we continue to gather this much attention, the chancellor and Horizon will notice us once we get closer."

"Heh heh. You want to split up? I thought wolves hunted in packs?"

"Would you rather I gave instructions as the pack leader? Split up and track them."

Just as Mitotsudaira followed up her instructions with a small snort, a shadow suddenly filled the sky.

She frowned and looked up.

A vermilion aerial ship passed by overhead. The logos of a nation and academy that it bore on the sides indicated that it was a diplomatic ship.

“That ship is from Tres España’s Alcalá de Something!” exclaimed Asama.

“Why is it in England!?”

“That would be Alcalá de Henares. ...And the armada battle may be approaching, but Tres España and England are not complete enemies. Tres España has likely sent an ambassador. As soon as this festival ends, Tres España will probably declare war and send out their invincible fleet.” Mitotsudaira took a breath and continued as she heard a bell ringing to the north. “Either during this festival or at its end, Mary Stuart’s execution will be determined.”

Two people stood on the front deck of the vermilion diplomatic ship floating in the sky. Being a diplomatic ship, the terrace was made so one could view the ground below. Standing there were a girl with two false arms and a lean long-lived man with a mustache.

The long-lived man, Velázquez, spoke to the girl, Gin.

“It looks like we are being confined here, but we should be able to return to the third level. I guess we can’t fly right up to the embassy. ...But look, Gin. Isn’t that Mary Stuart in the Tower of London?”

He pointed toward a building on the first level several kilometers away, but Gin only narrowed her eyes.

“I apologize, but you are a mountain-type long-lived race, correct?”

“What? Oh, sorry. My sight is a lot better than yours. It’s a racial difference.”

Velázquez sent his brush dancing through the air and painted a picture in midair.

The picture showed the source of the ringing bell. He painted the Tower of London to provide a magnified image.

In only a few seconds, he completed the image of a fortress with a tower in all four directions.

“The Tower of London,” said Gin with a nod. “It is technically both a fortress and a palace. It exists in front of Oxford Academy, the queen lives there, and political prisoners are kept there.”

“Can you see it?”

“Testament.”

Gin could see a woman looking down from the viewing platform below the tower’s roof. She wore England’s girls uniform. Her hat and the blind covering her face made her age impossible to judge. However...

“She is likely the same age as us, but I cannot say for sure with her face hidden.”

“You say ‘us’, but that’s a wide range if you include me.”

“I was using Muneshige as the standard.”

“Testament, testament. I see. But she is a spirit and human mix. The spirit was a dryad, I believe. She was born between a Celtic spirit and Henry VIII. I don’t like not being able to hear anything, but people are probably shouting insults.”

“No, I do not think so.”

“Why not?” asked Velázquez.

Gin pointed at Mary in the painting.

“Someone who bears herself like this would have a detached attitude if she were being insulted. She would likely look up into the sky. I cannot be sure with the blind in the way, but I think she is looking down into the city.”

“You mean she is exchanging glances with the people?”

“Testament. It is as if she is asking them if they have anything to say to her.”

“Women are scary,” muttered Velázquez before scratching at his head. “What should we do? She’s Catholic like us, so should we go save her?”

“Why would we ruin the history recreation more than necessary? Our visit here is acceptable as long as it leaves no records, but that would be unavoidable if we rescued her.”

“You’re becoming more and more like Juana.”

“No, I have a long way to go,” stated Gin. “It takes one of the Eight Great Dragon Kings to spread your legs and use your breasts like that for the man you are interested in. I have realized how much I still have to learn.”

“...I think you’ve made some kind of major misunderstanding.”

“Let us set that aside.” Gin used a hand to stop him and then pointed toward the ship they stood on. “The armada battle we must fight will begin shortly after Mary Stuart is executed. Once that is over, Tres España’s decline is guaranteed and the nation’s policy will turn toward controlling and stopping that decline.”

“That would be nice, but nations cannot always follow the ideal path. It requires money, after all. Tres España poured more money into the armada battle than any other event in its history, so it could easily lead to our decline no matter what result it has. Everyone is trying to bring the battle to a nice end, but it will be difficult to achieve a result that lets us stand up to the other nations. Whether we can do this or not is...”

Velázquez stopped there and placed a hand on his head as if holding his hat in place.

“Sorry, I know I should keep a more positive outlook as the older one.”

“Testament. You are quite pessimistic. I did not realize you were that kind of person.”

“Really?” Velázquez smiled a bit. “Then maybe I should tell you this: you’re just as ignorant of the world as I thought.”

“That is not a problem as long as I have Muneshige,” declared Gin. She raised her false arms a bit, nodded, and spoke as if to herself. “I am a boring girl, after all.”

“Is that so?” asked Velázquez in a tone that said he did not agree. “So is the meeting over?”

“Why are you using a word from the enemy’s language like ‘meeting’? Our secretary is a very free person, isn’t he?”

“You probably shouldn’t use the English word ‘free’ when saying things like that. ...Anyway, don’t forget your job. All the others are kids who have their hands full with themselves and someone else, so I have to keep things running smoothly as your elder. And I’ll do anything to ensure it.”

“Allow me to make a correction. Our secretary is a very kind person.”

“Hah. I already knew that.”

Suddenly, Gin froze in place and Velázquez frowned.

The bell had stopped ringing.

The sound lingered for a bit, but Gin merely stared toward the second level.

“The atmosphere has changed.”

“...? Yes, Mary is gone. She must have gone back inside.”

“Testament. But that is not all. What is this?”

Gin closed her eyes and focused on her ears. She could hear the distant people enjoying the festival.

“A powerful presence has entered the city. No, several of them. The people have sensed these presences which has produced a subtle change in the festival noises. Some are heading toward them and others are avoiding them. I can only say two things for sure.” She took a breath. “They are not attempting to hide their presence and their objective is unknown. Secretary, please land this ship somewhere as soon as possible.”

“What are you going to do, 3rd special duty officer?”

“It is simple. I will join the festival to sound out the objective of these presences. Have you forgotten the mission Lady Juana gave us?”

She went on to remind him what that was.

“We are to declare war and, if possible, find an excuse beyond Mary’s execution so England has no way of escaping.”

As the ringing of the bell lingered in the air above the wheat field, Scarred looked toward the second level.

...What is this?

The movements of the wind and earth spirits told her something was happening. The spirits that human eyes could not see were worried about the city.

Those spirits were a lot like ether, so ley line disturbances bothered them the most.

...People using spells or bearing weapons have entered the city without sealing anything off.

And...

...I know what that means.

She turned toward him and narrowed her eyes.

“We have spent an extravagant amount of time here.”

“Hm?” Tenzou turned around and tilted his head. “What is it?”

“Nothing,” she responded with a bitter smile. “Are you interested in the festival on the second level?”

That question caused Tenzou to look toward the second level just as she was.

“How odd,” he said.

“What is?”

“Testament. The noises of the city are not merely those of joy or excitement. I am detecting shades of confusion and surprise. They both sound the same at first, but...”

The wind blew in as he spoke.

That wind seemed to wash across the land.

It contained a heat that indicated the change from morning to midday. It was produced in the warm ocean and city and it met in the middle at the wheat field.

“Ah.”

“Are you all right, Scarred-dono?”

Tenzou moved in front of her to block the wind, but she did not put her cloak's hood back up. She stood amidst the short and still-growing wheat and used her fingers to brush her hair back into place. The wind weakened, but it did not die down altogether.

The wind spirits were confused. Some were trying to flee the city and some were on their way to see what was happening in the city. Those two groups were running into each other, shaking free of each other, and restraining each other.

But as the wind blew, Scarred narrowed her eyes and looked up at him.

...Everything has decided to take the first step.

So...

“Shall we head to the upper levels, Master Tenzou?”

“What?”

His tone made it clear he had not expected this question, so she smiled.

“I can go all the way to the first level.”

“Eh? Oh, um...b-but why?”

If she had asked him if he did not want to, he would likely have gone with her.

And so...

“Because I want to go there with you.”

“What?”

Scarred found his confusion a bit frightening. She did not know if he was simply surprised or if he did not feel that way about her in the least, but it did not sit well with her heart.

And so she continued speaking.

“I will guide you to the location of the Princess Disappearance I know about.”

“That would be...”

Scarred watched as a look of realization appeared on Tenzou's face and then his hesitation vanished. He had realized this was a job as a ninja of Musashi.

"Please do," he said with a nod.

"Judge," she replied with a nod of her own. She then looked up at his diligent expression. "But do you mind? There is one thing I must take care of."

"Judge. What is it?"

"Judge. If we are to go there, we must pass through the city and the festival occurring there. I must first buy things at some of the festival stands and offer some of it to the earth spirits. After that, I must walk around a bit to aid digestion and then take a short rest."

"I see. So it is the same as a battle."

"Judge. It is indeed a type of battle. I will be changing into my casual clothes, so please wait a moment. We can meet at the carriage stop up above. A carriage will come by every ten minutes today."

"Judge," replied Tenzou with a bow.

As he turned around, Scarred walked toward the village she lived in.

She heard him muttering to himself behind her.

"Huh? ...Something about that seems odd. But I suppose it could be true."

She smiled bitterly and sensed the atmosphere of the city from the noises carried by the wind.

"..."

She closed her eyes, decided to force a smile, and quickened her pace.

Chapter 27: One who Stands Alone in the Stage Wing

CHAPTER 27

"One who Stands Alone in the Stage Wing"



When two people are not a pair
Even when together
What do you call them?

Point Allocation (Relationship)

When two people are not a pair

Even when together

What do you call them?

Point Allocation (Relationship)

...The immediate situation is similar to a date, but the overall situation makes us enemies.

In the event warehouse, Neshinbara stared silently forward with the half-lidded eyes that had not left his face for a while now. His arms dangled by his sides and he had no desire to eat the lunch he had bought.

...Crossunite-kun has been receiving a lunch from that cloaked man. It's like that man is his loving wife, but that thought scares me. Plus, it's usually Crossunite-kun who plays the wife role in the doujinshi.

With that thought, he suddenly felt something from his right arm.

“Kh...”

It throbbed. It felt like a painful itching was scratching at all the blood vessels in that arm.

He felt like someone was grabbing the back of his hand from above, so he raised his hand. Glowing strings of writing had appeared not just around the hand with its bulging blood vessels but around the bandages as well.

The pain and itching of Macbeth was pulsating. But the rhythm of that pulse was not his own. And that caused the discomfort to intensify into a power that was attempting to control him. Neshinbara turned to the right to look at the one who had created Macbeth. That controlling pulse belonged to...

“Shakespeare...”

His voice grew quieter partway through speaking her name. Strings of writing were slowly coming from her long hair and falling to the floor. He only noticed it now because the angle of the sunlight passing through the ceiling had changed. But...

“What play have you started!? And why!?”

She did not respond, but his question was answered by their surroundings.

He heard laughter. That laughter which sounded both like mocking laughter and snickering came from the canyon before his eyes. The laughter was in response to his shouted questions, but it was strangely solid and loud.

...They aren't even trying to hide it!? Why?

And then it hit him.

“You put a curse on the customers!?”

“No. What a rude misunderstanding,” muttered Shakespeare while she closed her book. The laughter of the surrounding people formed the background music of their exchange. “I have prepared a stage for us to confront each other. This is a prototype barrier-style stage that will prevent damage to the city or its people and keep all of you from escaping. It is up to everyone else whether it will be used. The ones out in London are the eight members of the Trumps other than the queen, Jonson, Dudley, Cecil, and Grace.”

Eight names were displayed on the sign frame she showed him.

8. Assistant Secretary: Nicholas Bacon – Hammer user and trickster. Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England.

7. Treasurer: Charles Howard – Naval admiral. Wealthy common sense man. No combat ability.

5-1. Francis Drake – Hard Wolf and naval vice admiral. Essentially the commander. Testamenta Arma user.

5-2. John Hawkins – Drake’s companion. Swimsuit man.

5-3. Thomas Cavendish – Drake and the others’ underclassman. Mermaid woman.

3. Christopher Hatton – Lord Chancellor and Living Bones.

2. F. Walsingham – Automaton leader of the public morals committee. Spymaster.

1. Walter Raleigh – Far Easterner. Elizabeth’s wartime advisor.

“Even the ones without official positions can rival an army on their own and even I, one of the Eight Great Dragon Kings, view them as strange. Ever since the Trumps were formed, we have not had special duty officers like other academies, but do not let your guard down. Whether human or not, they are representatives of this land of non-humans.”

“Why are they doing this!?”

She went on to say exactly what he feared she would.

“You don’t get it? When Musashi arrived, the Trumps were assembled and we made a unanimous decision. We will keep Musashi here in England to use it in our negotiations with the Testament Union and other nations.”

“Wait,” muttered Neshinbara. “Then...”

He was already standing up from his chair.

“Then was this festival a trap?”

“It was not a trap,” replied Shakespeare while still facing forward. “It is a cultural exchange. In the form of dueling. And if the one we duel is defeated, we earn the right to duel someone of a higher level.”

Neshinbara thought on the meaning of “someone of a higher level”.

“You’re going to defeat someone to earn the right to duel our chancellor?”

“Your chancellor is known as Mr. Impossible, but he is ranked at the top, both as chancellor and student council president. To duel him, someone at least at the level of vice chancellor or vice president would be best. However, this was suggested by Howard and Jonson, so no one is ranked that high. That is why we must duel and defeat someone at the level of secretary, treasurer, or special duty officer. We must prove we have the strength to duel someone of higher rank. So if any one of our people win, Musashi’s chancellor will be drawn inside my theatre space as he enjoys himself in London. There, he will duel that winner.”

“Do you really think you can do that?”

She must think they can, thought Neshinbara.

But Shakespeare’s response was different.

“I don’t know.” She tilted her head and spoke as if she barely even cared. “All I had to do was prepare the stage. I prefer creating more than I do fighting. If what I create results in a battle, that will help the others, but it is not my style to create for that reason.”

“Then...” began Neshinbara. “Why did you give me the curse of Macbeth?”

“Oh,” said Shakespeare as if she had only just remembered. “I wanted a critic like you to know what it feels like to be criticized.”

“Now,” muttered Shakespeare as she looked forward once more. “It is all up to the others. And a quick warning: if you try to warn Musashi’s chancellor or do anything else, I will not hesitate to enclose you in the theatre space.”

“Are you holding me hostage?”

“Do not be ridiculous. I am simply saying there may be a continuation to the play everyone is beginning now. They may reach the ultimate encore by dueling

Musashi's chancellor." She ignored Neshinbara as he clenched his teeth and she continued facing forward. "According to Howard, we will prevent Musashi from continuing on and then we will invite you into England. That seems to be the plan."

"Why!?"

"Because the Testament Union will not accept 'we were unable to do anything to Musashi' or 'we settled things through politically negotiations' as excuses. You already caused a military conflict at Mikawa, so an equal reaction is expected from us. If we do not provide it, the Testament Union will make us pay the price."

But...

"But Musashi is a dangerous stage. After setting foot there once, everyone knew that holding the battle there would be a bad idea. Instead, we let you land, so we can confront you on our home turf. And while driving your emergency stores down, we used the possibility of negotiations and the festival as bait to keep you from fleeing to another nation. When you agreed to the festival and sent out an ambassador, Howard was delighted. With the ambassador in our grasp, Musashi cannot send itself or its transport ships down to the city and we can use her as a hostage to draw in the other officers. If this fails, we are prepared to write it off as a piece of 'festival entertainment'. That is why the stage I have prepared is the comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*."

"You'll regret this."

Neshinbara's line did not produce a nod from Shakespeare. She merely brushed up her hair to better show the writing spilling out of it.

"As long as I can perform a test run on my barrier-style theatre space, it does not matter to me."

She sat cross-legged on her chair, pulled a new novel from the paper bag next to her, and continued speaking.

“Also, this is a desperate attempt for the others. But that means it should be enough to stop any complaints from the Testament Union. None of the other nations have fought you on their mainland, so this should give us an advantage over the others. This is a battle between representatives, but this is based in the single combat allowed by the academy rules for battles between nations. If they have any complaints, they will have to base their complaints in the academy rules.

“What do you think? Will your comrades be captured and made into bargaining chips or will they play their roles in the play and face the audience for the curtain call? My Lord Chamberlain’s Men is barrier-style this time. With our two groups up on the stage and unable to escape, there will be no damage to the audience or the props on the stage. We only need to remember that this is our home turf and defeat you. Negotiations, combat, spells...anything goes. If even one of our officers wins, we will have the card needed to stop Musashi and the right to duel Mr. Impossible. You understand the rest, don’t you? We have a hostage and this is our home turf, but this is a play.

“Welcome to the festival. I look forward to seeing everyone’s performance. How about you?” She took a breath. “As the producer, let me say this: ladies and gentlemen, it is time to raise the curtain.”

It happened suddenly.

It began with what looked like a slight shudder from Asama. That immediately told Mitotsudaira what had happened.

“Silver chains!”

She gently bent her knees and grasped the tight arms on the ends of the silver chains with her slightly spread hands.

She looked down and saw the metal fingers that resembled giant red jewels or decorations. They glowed dully in her hands and her fingertips stretched out nervously.

She was prepared to begin fighting at any moment.

And then she saw a single tamagushi stabbed into the ground at Asama's feet.

That tamagushi was meant to create a barrier.

Shirasago Enterprises, sponsor of the Asama Shrine, was a sister corporation of IZUMO and it primarily produced Shinto products. They were known for producing Shinto equipment in a more serious vein than IZUMO which was still growing, but they had no real idiosyncrasies. However, that was the safest option when facing an unknown threat in a foreign land.

Asama's tamagushi was made from strengthened oak wood, it was lacquered white, and the sharpened tip glowed due to the spell which increased its penetrative power. A circular design covered the area within three meters of the tamagushi and a certain change occurred there.

Bluish-white text gushed up from the ground and wrapped around Shirasago sponsor logo and the musical text purifying the inside of the circular barrier. The logo and text quickly began to waver. As Mitotsudaira wondered what this was, she arrived at a certain memory.

...Shakespeare's script!?

As soon as she had that thought, Asama loudly stepped forward with her right leg. She clapped once.

“Music!”

With her voice, the strings of words from the script inside the circle shattered.

At the same time, the circle on the ground settled in place and the barrier was complete.

Mitotsudaira did not know what spell had caused those bluish-white words that now disappeared into the atmosphere. However, she did know that Asama's barrier was a safe place now that it was complete.

And that was why she stepped toward the barrier.

“Tomo, what is...?”

She was going to say “happening”.

But then Mitotsudaira realized a certain fact.

Asama and Kimi vanished before her eyes.

“An illusion!?”

Mitotsudaira was confused by Asama and Kimi’s disappearance.

It was not an illusion.

But the two were gone. Asama had set up the barrier, and yet they had vanished.

The surrounding people were still here, so what had happened?

That pair had large mass...or rather, volume, so it would create a huge burden to make them vanish. It pained her to admit it, but she would have been much easier to make vanish. So what was going on?

A sudden thought came to her and she turned around. Black and gold wings and hair had been there a moment before, but...

...They’re gone too!?

Mitotsudaira raised her hips and gently had one silver chain scratch at the area Naito and Naruze had been and another at the area Asama and Kimi had been. But the chains found nothing and they tilted their heads.

She looked around again while once again wondering what had happened.

She realized the people were looking toward her. They were not muttering to themselves and they were not causing a commotion.

“ ... ”

They were simply turning expectant gazes in her direction with a sound similar to the moving of the tide. As they looked up at her, they all had thin and joyous smiles plastered on their faces.

...Is this...?

And she spoke the answer she had arrived at.

“This is some kind of barrier. Given the people England has at their disposal, this is likely a ‘stage’ created by Shakespeare’s spell. And this is a combat stage that draws in only the chosen representative and an audience that will enjoy the battle.”

Which meant...

“Have we all been taken to separate stages for duels between students!?”

She understood.

It had begun. This would be a battle between England and Musashi in the form of duels between their representatives.

They were in a dangerous position, but so was someone else.

“Suzu is in trouble in her role as ambassador.”

But then Mitotsudaira shook her head. Suzu had Adele and Futayo with her.

And if she could leave Suzu to those two, there was something else she had to do.

...My king is on a date and trying to determine his policy!

How would Musashi and the Far East face the other nations from now on? Her king was attempting to make up his mind on that issue.

And if someone was intending to bring harm to that king in the form of a confrontation...

“As a knight, I will let my king and princess enjoy this festival!”

Mitotsudaira ran forward. She doubted she could meet her king in this strange space.

“But we will all do everything we can to see this festival through to the end!”

In order to protect that festival, Musashi’s knight raced on while praying.

●Landsknechte●



Sis! Sis! La la lan♪ Lan lan laan lan lan laan♪



Heh heh heh. ♪-brother, please stop with openings that make me worry about you. You wish to ask about the Landsknechte that Mitotsudaira mentioned, don't you?



What's with that name? It's a pain-in-the-ass to pronounce.



It isn't actually known why they are known as the Landsknechte. It's thought to be a mixture and/or corrupted form of a name for an area of land, a word for knight, and other things. The mercenary culture has actually existed for a long time, but the knights fell into ruin after around the 10th century and their fall was hastened by the crusades, so the ruined knights began working as mercenaries to earn money.



And that's how the Landsknechte got famous?



No. The first ones to get famous were the Kriegs Georgern (Swiss mercenaries) who fought for the independence of Switzerland. They did not stay within Switzerland and worked outside of the country, so sometimes Kriegs Georgern members would oppose each other on the battlefield. They were known as the ultimate mercenary group due to their regulated method of combat. The Landsknechte copied them while adding on the fact that they were former knights and wore gaudy outfits. The different countries and principalities were at war, so the mercenary commanders would immediately begin recruiting whenever war broke out nearby. They were not a standing army, so they had no constant maintenance costs. This made them easy to use for whoever hired them. The Landsknechte stood out well, so their services became well known. This led to them spreading everywhere. At the time, anyone could become a mercenary and it was a good way of earning prestige.

They were armed with pikes, halberds, and short swords. They were also issued rifles when they were available. They could be hired for 4 gulden a month (approx. 400,000 yen). They had their own laws, they formed regiments made of ten 300-600 men companies, and they had a number of different officer positions, but the most interesting part was the inspection for entering the Landsknechte, their oath to god, and the joint decision-making right that allowed lower ranked members to gather together and give their opinion to their commander. They were like knights in some ways and more modern in others. The mercenary group would form a sort of small city with a canteen they could all eat at, prostitutes that were everyone's mother, and even a judicial system. Everyone was equal under the law. It was probably a comfortable place for those who had nowhere else to go.



Nwooooh! Isn't that a lot of information?



Be a bit more patient. Anyway, at around the 16th century, the central countries of Europe used mercenaries to wage war, but the wars grew larger and dragged on longer than expected. The costs piled up, the mercenaries had little experience because the group would break apart once the war was over, and the mercenaries' equipment was not the best, so having a standing army became the better option. The mercenaries would also loot, so they were rough on the countries they fought in. It reached the point that they even had terms like joint looting (stealing as a group and distributing it) and wildcat looting (stealing on one's own and keeping it all for oneself).



Sounds like something from a video game.



Did you even hear a word I said besides "looting"?

Study

Landsknechte

Toori: Sis! Sis! La la lan♪ Lan lan laan lan lan laan♪

Kimi: Heh heh heh. ♪-brother, please stop with openings that make me worry about you. You wish to ask about the Landsknechte that Mitotsudaira mentioned, don't you?

Toori: What's with that name? It's a pain-in-the-ass to pronounce.

Kimi: It isn't actually known why they are known as the Landsknechte. It's thought to be a mixture and/or corrupted form of a name for an area of land, a word for knight, and other things. The mercenary culture has actually existed for a long time, but the knights fell into ruin after around the 10th century and their fall was hastened by the crusades, so the ruined knights began working as mercenaries to earn money.

Toori: And that's how the Landsknechte got famous?

Kimi: No. The first ones to get famous were the Kriechs Georgern who fought for the independence of Switzerland. They did not stay within Switzerland and worked outside of the country, so sometimes Kriechs Georgern members would oppose each other on the battlefield. They were known as the ultimate mercenary group due to their regulated method of combat. The Landsknechte copied them while adding on the fact that they were former knights and wore gaudy outfits. The different countries and principalities were at war, so the mercenary commanders would immediately begin recruiting whenever war broke out nearby. They were not a standing army, so they had no constant maintenance costs. This made them easy to use for whoever hired them. The Landsknechte stood out well, so their services became well known. This led to them spreading everywhere. At the time, anyone could become a mercenary and it was a good way of earning prestige.

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Toori: Nwooooh! Isn't that a lot of information?

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Toori: Sounds like something from a video game.

Kimi: Did you even hear a word I said besides "looting"?

Chapter 28: Defenders of the Bulwark

CHAPTER 28

"Defenders of the Bulwark"



You may have new clothes to change into
But do you have a new heart to change into?
Point Allocation (Play)

You may have new clothes to change into

But do you have a new heart to change into?

Point Allocation (Play)

A corridor was made from rectangular stones. The floor was made of wood boards and carpet and someone was creating quick footsteps along it. The glasses-wearing girl had an armband which read “Temporary Aide to the Vice Chancellor – Adele Balfette”. She wore a baggy Far Eastern uniform and she glanced out the window.

“Oxford’s school building really is a castle. We were told not to set foot outside the fortress to ensure our safety, but we’re completely isolated with divine communications to the first level and beyond cut off.”

She did not know why, but this situation had started about half an hour ago. For security’s sake, Futayo had given a few orders and headed for the courtyard.

...But based on what we can see out the window, she said an odd atmosphere has fallen over London.

Futayo had said some sounds were missing. Adele did not know the details, but Futayo had said something about a hostile presence.

That meant they needed to strengthen their defenses without England catching on.

...If necessary, we can escape.

They were currently in the southern wall of the outer walls surrounding Oxford Academy’s main building. Despite the name, the wall was essentially a castle with several floors inside. Currently, Adele arrived at one end of the third floor which overlooked London.

“This is Suzu-san and our room.”

She stopped in front of the large double doors, took in a breath, and knocked.

“Um, Suzu-saaaaan?”

“Oh, yes. J-just a second.”

“Okay. Judge.”

This was a code. When they detected something odd outside the room, they needed to investigate it. However, heading out into the hall and just standing there while looking around would make their objective too obvious. That was why Suzu always said she needed time to prepare when someone left or entered the room.

As Adele placed her hand on the doorknob, she looked around out of the corners of her eyes.

“Are you ready yet?”

“N-no. Not yet.”

Adele asking “can I come in yet?” was the sign that her investigation was complete. Asking other questions in the meantime was meant to put Suzu at ease, but Adele then pulled a paper bag from her uniform’s sleeve.

“They were selling some pretty hairpins at the school store. Price-wise, buying a set of three was best, but that’s all right, don’t you think?”

She held up the hairpin set clipped to a sheet of paper and used the action to check the area to the left. That direction was the most suspicious.

...Oh, they’re here already.

There was no movement or noise from the corridor or neighboring room. Just as on her way here, the area looked completely deserted.

...But I can sense their presence.

Even if people hid, made no noise, and stopped moving, they could not hide the movements of the air, the scents, the warmth, and the movement of the birds outside the windows. She was the only one in this corridor, but the birds were not landing on the windowsills further along and a flock of doves was circling in the air near the roof.

Someone was in the corridor and other areas visible through the windows. Naturally, they were also on the roof.

...They can reach us from both the roof and the corridor.

Most likely, some kind of service would arrive through the corridor. Someone would arrive with a letter or some tea and Adele would open the door.

...At which point they will attack from the corridor. But that is only meant to keep us here.

Their goal was to capture Suzu. If they had the ambassador, they would be able to defeat their opponents while retaining a pipeline for negotiations.

In that case, the double doors became an unexpected problem. If both sides were opened, Adele could not cover the entire space. And if she was stopped there, they could send more men in from the roof. While her hands were full, they would likely use ropes to enter through the window and secure Suzu.

The knights known as vassals were supposed to protect important people, so she had attended afterschool extracurricular lessons that taught countermeasures for indoor attacks like this. While she recalled those various methods, she said “judge” in her heart.

“Can I come in yet?”

“Oh, uh...Y-yes.”

“Judge.”

While recalling the layout of the room, Adele opened the large double doors.

Adele entered a room that had stone walls and carpet. The room was about twenty square meters and faced south. The bedroom area was located on the eastern side and a table set sat in the center. A desk and their equipment were on the western side.

Suzu sat next to a wash basin on a side table by the window.

The girl wore one of England's uniforms. The room was being bugged, so it would seem suspicious if she did nothing while buying time with their code. Part of Adele's training as a vassal included searching for bugs. After locating them, she had left them be and used them to make England lower their guard.

For the past few days, they had ignored the bugs and lived their lives as normal, but something had happened to make England take action today.

...I hope our actions over the past few days have convinced them we haven't noticed the bugs.

As Suzu stood up, there was nothing odd about her appearance.

...Oh, she can dress herself.

The English uniform had been special-made in order to show the friendship between nations. However, Futayo had not wanted her measurements taken because it would reveal her exact reach during battle. Also, Adele had been extremely interested in the low-cut chest area, but the old woman tailor had made an unnecessary comment while taking her measurements.

“...Hm? W-well, don't worry. I'll make sure it will fit you properly.”

Due to that, Adele had not worn her uniform. Even so, she was considering taking it back to Musashi and having a one-man fashion show in her room.

But for the moment, she walked west to the right side of the room.

“Um, Suzu-san? Your uniform is a bit twisted. Uh, could you come over to the mirror? Oh, the light from the window is making a reflection.”

As Suzu cautiously walked over, Adele closed the curtain halfway. Now half of the room could not be seen from outside and Suzu entered that half.

“U-um. Th-this.”

She pulled out and held up one of the rod-shaped sensors of Noise Neighbor at her waist. The sensor had a charm wrapped around it and a sign frame opened. As Adele made various preparations, the sign frame displayed a text version of the outside noises detected with extremely high sensitivity. Specifically, it displayed the conversation of the English attack unit waiting in the neighboring room. It appeared they were indeed being bugged.

“Testament. The vassal has entered the room.”

“Testament. Prepare to attack. After approaching the door using stealth entry, use some kind of service to have her open the door. Or go with a dynamic entry once you draw her over.”

“Who will secure the target?”

“As commander, that falls to me.”

“Commander, I am impressed with your honesty, but you’re past middle age. That would be a crime!”

“But my daughter has started resisting when I try to pick her up...”

“Testament. We have so much training every day that we rarely get to go home.”

Adele found the conversation fascinating, but she decided to bring it to an end before she started feeling sorry for them. She noisily moved her baggy sleeve while grabbing Suzu’s hand.

“Um, over here. I’ll help you change.”

“Testament!” said the English students. “Th-his will be the last time, so give us a running commentary! We need commentary!!”

Maybe we should record all of this and use it in a later negotiation, thought Adele as she pulled away a giant cloth cover at one end of the room. It covered...

...My vassal mobile shell.

The mobile shell was kneeling with its head lowered. She had been allowed to bring it with her as long as its spear and ether fuel tank were removed. Even so, there had been harsh opposition, so Masazumi had said the following during negotiations:

“Due to Adele’s bodyguard training, she has difficulty sleeping outside of the mobile shell. It was also given to her by her late father, so it would be cruel to ask her not to bring it with her. I have heard England is a land of chivalry and mercy, so could you perhaps view it as nothing but ‘thick pajamas’?”

That politician girl had forced through that nonsense with a straight face.

And since they were being bugged, Adele would have been forced to play the part, but Suzu had made a thoughtful suggestion.

“I-I’m afraid...to...to sleep on my own...s-so will you...sleep with me?”

That had saved Adele from that political inconvenience. Futayo had said she was not used to sleeping in a bed, so she had brought her own futon and slept under the bed. However, she tossed and turned quite aggressively in her sleep. She had even shouted “Bind! Tonbokiri!!” in her sleep and kicked the bed up into the air, but she had not used Tonbokiri itself.

At any rate, Adele now stood within the mobile shell’s feet. She placed her own feet on what corresponded to a shoe’s insole. This was the starting point of putting on the mobile shell.

The shell was quite heavy, so it would take a long time to put on with human strength and the person inside would be injured if anything slid out of place. For

that reason, the back of the shell was connected by a frame and would open up on its own. The shell would automatically stand up, envelop the person from the front, and then close behind them.

Adele used the auxiliary foot pedal on the inside of the right foot.

...I'll set it to a long-term seal. Using the underwater settings might prevent interference from the air outside.

After setting it up, she tugged on Suzu's hand. She brought Suzu's legs to her lap while sensing how high up they were.

"Okay, I'll be removing this now."

She was afraid to them being caught in the closing process, so she removed Suzu's skirt and jacket.

"She's undressing! She's undressing!!" shouted the English unit.

...Shut up.

But her own uniform was too big for her because of the large hard points she wore for the mobile shell, so she removed her own sleeves and skirt.

...That should free up some room.

As she thought, Adele connected the hard points on Suzu's sides and back to the hard points to the sides of her own chest. That fixed their positions together.

"...!? I thought they were undressing, but that sounded more like weaponry!"

...Too slow.

Adele moved her right leg.

"Contact!"

After pushing the mobile shell's left foot pedal once, Adele rose up. She then used her foot to operate the safety lock to show it had not been mistakenly activated.

“...!”

Suzu shrunk down as it came. The mobile shell's thick and wide humanoid back and limbs used wire cylinders to rise up in front of them. The back expanded up, down, left and right and the darkness within approached them. But a close inspection showed several cross-style sign frames already open within.

“Mobile Shell ‘Raging Beast’ : Connecting : Today’s Motto ‘What’s wrong with being hopeless? That’s just how it is.’ ”

It gave a strange motto every time she started it up, but she guessed that was due to her father who had created it. She felt a calendar would have been better, but then leap years would have caused problems.

With the movement of the wind, the mobile shell enveloped Adele and Suzu. Once the back reinforcement and forward-collapsed head closed, it would be complete. She had set it to fully seal, so the helmet's face shield would remain airtight and no images from outside would be displayed. A light came on within the head, the head closed above them, and the waist lowered into a reclining position.

“Complete.”

But just before it fully closed, a group of men kicked down the door and charged in. They wore English uniforms with combat gear reinforcements.

“Shit!” shouted one man the instant he saw them. “They weren’t changing at all! They toyed with our pure hearts!!”

As Adele raised her right thumb with a half-lidded glare, the mobile shell fully closed.

In the next instant, a seat was formed behind her, an inner space was created by the shell expanding and sealing everything off, and a light illuminated the space.

“Um, Suzu-san? You can move now.”

“Nn ... That was...kind of surprising. But...there’s a lot of...space in here.”

“It’s made so someone can live inside while it’s sealed. Basically, the inner and outer shells expand to form a small room. When a castle falls or a ship sinks, I can enter this mode and wait for rescue. I even have snacks and drinks in here.”

She disconnected their hard points from each other and then disconnected the hard points on her back from the mobile shell’s frame. Those connections synced her with the frame and aided her movements, but she wanted to avoid moving in this sealed space so long as they received no divine protection to regulate their body temperature.

She lifted up Suzu’s waist and placed her on the right side of the seat. She took the left side for herself. While in this mode, the sign frames that would normally appear on the outside instead appeared on the inside. After checking a few of them, she adjusted the temperature setting.

“Okay, we’ll be waiting here until things are over outside. That should be about an hour. I have music, music games, and snacks.”

She shook the paper bag from the school store to tell Suzu what was inside and then she placed it above their heads. Suzu heard it and smelled it.

“Apple...pie?”

“Judge. That’s right. We can eat them later as lunch.”

“Judge. Oh, b-but is Futayo...-san okay?”

“Judge.”

Despite her reply, Adele was worried. Futayo had been the one to suggest being on the lookout.

...And she said someone wanted a duel with her.

She had gone outside with Tonbokiri in hand and she had told Adele to ensure Suzu's safety until she returned or until they could contact the Musashi.

...But who is this that Futayo-san considers a worthy opponent for a duel?

As Adele wondered who among the Trumps it could be, she smiled.

“Well, Futayo-san should be fine. She might be quite dangerous when it comes to her human side, but she's quite dangerous in the literal sense as well.”

So...

“I'm glad she's on our side.”

“You are Far Eastern, aren't you? Are you not an ally of the Far East?”

A female voice reverberated within an open area surrounded by stone walls on all sides.

The voice was directed toward a man standing on the grass in front of a girl in a Far Eastern uniform whose hair was worn up in a high ponytail. The man's hair was also worn up in a high ponytail, but he casually wore an English uniform.

The girl held up a long spear in her right hand.

The man, on the other hand, rested a giant sword hilt over his right shoulder. It had a guard at the top of the hilt, but the actual blade was missing. Smaller versions that were more the size of a normal sword hilt and guard were equipped across his clothing.

They were seven meters apart.

They were the only two in the courtyard. Whether on the nearby western wall, the three more distant walls, the towers at the corners, the Oxford school buildings to the north, or in the nearby trees or pond, not a single other person was visible.

Those two figures were the only ones there and they reacted to each other's presence.

“ ... ”

They slowly lowered their waists. And the girl spoke.

“Far East, Musashi Ariadust Academy, Strike Forcer, Honda Futayo. I hold the position of vice chancellor.”

The man, however, silently held up the armband on his left arm. The girl narrowed her eyes when she saw it.

“England, Oxford Academy, Trumps 1, Walter Raleigh. That is you, correct? You explore the New World and supervise the land army,” she said. “But most of the Far Eastern residents of England are refugees from the Amako clan after its destruction by Mouri and Hexagone Française. ... The Amako clan was located on the northern shore of Hexagone Française which is England's territory on the Far Eastern mainland. They were also the protectors of IZUMO. In order to hold Hexagone Française and Mouri in check, England and the Hashiba clan of M.H.R.R. aided the revival of Amako, but it failed.” She took a breath. “There was supposedly a group known as the Amako Ten Braves. Are you a survivor of that group?”

The man did not respond. He did not even nod or shake his head.

But that was exactly why Futayo nodded and pulled Tonbokiri back just a bit. Without reversing her right wrist, she placed her left hand along the grip from below and lightly stepped forward to use her right leg as a pivot. And then she dropped her heel down.

“Judge. I see you are a man of few words. In that case...”

Walter instantly shrank down. He held his body down like drawing a bowstring.

“...!”

Futayo stepped forward with some slight initial speed and Walter unleashed an attack to intercept her. Their attacks crossed paths at their ideal distances.

“It seems Suzu-san and Adele, Futayo, Heidi and Shirojiro, and Toori-kun and Horizon are all outside. The five who are trapped inside the theatre barrier are Mito, Masazumi, Naito, Naruze, and Urquiaga. However, it seems Suzu-san’s group is cut off from our divine transmissions.”

On an abandoned street, Asama used a sign frame to track the movements outside the purification barrier she had set up. She could only pick up faint readings, but it was enough for some basic information.

“Mito’s presence is moving toward the border between the city and the nature district. She is likely headed toward Toori-kun and Horizon. We should go too, Kimi. I wish we could send divine mail, but this barrier is too complex.”

She crouched down next to the tamagushi stabbed into the ground at her feet and placed a hand on the torii-style sign frame floating above it. She used her fingertips to check on the concise settings displayed in the sign frame and then she pinched the torii and spun it. The barrier at her feet floated up from the ground and slowly began to spin.

...Good.

Once Asama pulled out the tamagushi and stood up, she pulled a new tamagushi from her hair and brought it next to the active one in her hand. At the same time, Hanami clapped her hands from Asama’s shoulder.

“Prayer setting – Duplication – Clap.”

A small humanoid Mouse appeared above both of the tamagushi for just an instant. They exchanged a high five and vanished, but this produced a barrier from the new one.

“Good.”

After muttering the comment under her breath this time, Asama spun the torii above one of the tamagushi again and then pressed it down. This caused the barrier to shrink.

“I have set it for individual use, so take it, Kimi.”

She turned around to find Kimi crouching down in the abandoned street with her hands covering her ears.

“Ahhhh! This is the occult! This has to be either a mass disappearance or the summoning of a hero to another world! At this rate, I will have no choice but to survive in this empty world with only a lewd, huge-breasted shrine maiden for company!”

Does she have to yell that so loudly? wondered Asama, but that was indeed the situation.

She sighed and held the tamagushi out toward Kimi.

“What’s this?” Kimi looked up. “Are you giving it to me?”

She wasn’t listening to a word I said? mentally complained Asama.

She sighed again as Kimi stood up and took the tamagushi.

Asama set her own tamagushi for individual use and spoke.

“If you carry that, you should be fine, so please calm down. Also, I think we were merely dragged in along with their intended targets.”

“Heh heh. How troublesome. I suppose it is true that trouble has a way of following a beautiful woman around. But do I have to actually carry it? I can’t just stick it into my body?”

“Eh? Um....stick it into your body? Um...uh...”

Kimi made a show of sticking the tamagushi between her breasts. She then turned a scornful eye toward Asama.

“Where were you going to stick it?”

Asama silently swung up her right fist, so Kimi quickly moved back a few steps. Asama could only sigh for the third time. She personally thought it would be dangerous if Kimi tripped with it held between her breasts.

“This has become a real problem.”

“Really? Isn’t this actually convenient for sightseeing?”

“Yes, but there are no store clerks or products. We are in some kind of alternate space.”

Kimi looked around at the empty streets of London.

“You mean this place isn’t the real city?”

“Not really,” said Asama. “I believe the real city is everywhere and yet also nowhere. Most likely, a massive space has been created that uses the city’s people and environment to create a number of different stages with an audience. Mito and the others have been trapped within those stages. I suppose you could call it a theatre space. Basically, everything from the people to the environment has been turned into something like a theatre. Everything is deserted as far as the eye can see, so a massive space must have been transformed. And that raises the question of what qualifies as ‘real’.”

“In other words, it’s like arguing what is ‘real’ on a face entirely covered in makeup? If you transform everything, you can only say the result is what’s real. ...Anyway, where are we exactly?”

“Somewhere with no audience and no stage. I believe this space corresponds to the entrance. Everything was brought to the theatre, and this is what is left over. If you look closely, you will see that the buildings and ground are slightly transparent. The ether making up this space has been taken away to form the alternate space for the theatre.”

“I don’t really understand, but I don’t really need to. Could I simply say that the people, the festival, Mitotsudaira, and the others were taken away to some other space and this is the leftover dregs?”

Asama answered Kimi’s interpretation with a nod. She then reached a hand out toward where Mitotsudaira had been.

“Mito was definitely here and she should have been inside my barrier.”

“Are you holding your hand out flat because you are thinking about the shape of the person you are searching for?”

“P-please do not make unnecessary comments.’

However, she could not help but wonder if she would have bent her fingers if it was Kimi or Naomasa she was searching for. At any rate, she checked and confirmed that Mitotsudaira was not there.

“This is probably an environmental spell and I noticed it because it was attempting to make me part of the audience. But my purification spell left you here and failed to keep Mito here. Does that mean...?”

“Your spell only works with girls who have something to grab onto!?”

Asama swung up her right fist again and Kimi fled once more.

“Listen,” she said. “The difference between us and Mito – oh, and Naruze and Naito as well – is that we do not hold officer positions. This spell created audiences and stages, so they must have been targeted as the ones to stand on those stages.”

“In that case...”

“Yes,” said Asama.

She did not want to say this. After all...

...It will make Kimi worry.

But Kimi would grow angry if Asama did not tell the truth.

“Toori-kun is in danger. They are almost certainly hoping for a duel with our top-ranking officer.”

Asama saw Kimi frown, but she continued speaking.

“Toori-kun is the chancellor and student council president. And Horizon may not be a part of the student council or chancellor’s officers, but she is heir to the Matsudaira clan and Vicereine of Musashi, so she ranks highly as well.”

She took a breath.

“Neither of them is experienced with combat, so they would both be excellent targets. I had heard Musashi’s representatives were being invited to a party and meeting at Oxford Academy this evening, but they must be using these battles between representatives to earn an advantage in the negotiations and to test our strength.”

Asama averted her gaze from Kimi.

...I want to avoid any odd requests.

While turning her eyes from the silence and stillness before her, she spoke as if setting fire to kindling.

“Most of our officers have been brought to the stages and all the others were likely added to the audiences because they couldn’t defend against the spell with a barrier like this.”

And...

“All of the officers will have been split up between the stages, so they will have be separated from each other and forced into odd combinations. So...”

While leaving the question of “what should we do?” implied, Asama stuck a hand in her pocket. She had a collection of charms, tamagushi, and other catalysts on the handheld level. She needed an excuse to violently interfere with this spell, and the shrine would likely accept ‘to save Kimi’s brother’ since Kimi was with her.

However...

“What do you think, Asama?”

“Eh?”

She had assumed she would be coerced into saving Toori, but Kimi said something else. After an instant of confusion, she looked up and saw Kimi looking down at the ground with a hand on her chin.

“I understand that my foolish brother and Horizon are in danger. But...”

“But?”

Asama almost asked “do you not want to go save them?” She wondered if Horizon’s appearance had made her want to change her position as the overprotective older sister. But as if to respond to those doubts, Kimi spoke plainly while staring at the ground with a serious expression.

“If someone as amazingly wonderful as me went to save them, it would be over in no time, but won’t it cause him problems if students without an officer position ignore the rules of the duel and defeat someone who does not want a duel with us? England is getting in the way of my fun, so I want to get in their way now, but perhaps there is a way to do so without causing any problems for my foolish brother. If there is, I want to use that method. After all...”

After all...

“This is his first date with Horizon. If Horizon had not been lost ten years ago, they would have gone to the festival then. And when it happened, I was out enjoying the event. I had no idea what had happened to the two of them. I did not learn about it until...”

Asama remembered. She added her own words as she recalled the past as well.

“Until I came to tell you.”

“Judge,” replied Kimi before looking Asama’s way. Her usual smile was missing from the corner of her mouth. She merely stared forward. “From that moment until my foolish brother’s treatment ended and he returned home, I constantly worried about what I should do. And I continued to worry about that even after he returned home. But now I think about it differently.” Kimi explained what she now thought. “Rather than worrying, I think carefully about what I can do for him. So what can I do that will allow that foolish brother’s first date to end without incident and will not cause him any problems later?”

After all...

“He said he wanted to use this date to see if Horizon has any interest in her emotions. And based on that, he will make his decision about what Musashi will do from now on and how we will face the rest of the world. In his own way, he has been thinking about tonight’s meeting.”

“In that case, Kimi, let’s start by trusting the others. Toori-kun said he would use this date to decide on his stance, so I think everyone understands how important it is. Like always, Toori-kun and Horizon will act like idiots, worry, and ultimately

find their answer, but I believe the others will surely protect them. They will provide a solid defense against England's right to duel our chancellor." Asama looked Kimi straight in the eye as she continued. "So let's support the others. They should be beginning their duels soon and I doubt they will all escape unharmed, so let's make some preparations to allay Toori-kun and everyone else's fears."

Chapter 29: Pilot in a Preparatory Place

CHAPTER 29

"Pilot in a Preparatory Place"



How do you do.
Why so nervous?

Point Allocation (Happiness)

How do you do.

Why so nervous?

Point Allocation (Happiness)

“...? What is this odd atmosphere? It’s like a stillness.”

Once the festival began, excitement had gently filled the city.

And as the different parts of London grew busy, Masazumi was tilting her head in the plaza to the side of Westminster Abbey.

This plaza bordered Soho’s nature park. It contained a number of warehouses which contained various festival events both on the outside and inside. Masazumi was interested in one in particular.

“There’s nothing like a used book market. Buying books so cheaply is wonderful.”

After the opening ceremony had ended, she had come here to kill time until she met with her comrades to discuss the party and meeting that evening.

She decided the atmosphere she sensed was just her imagination, so she continued walking through the aisles of books. She narrowed her eyes and already carried a full paper bag under one arm. She stepped lightly as she wandered through the warehouse and she was ultimately drawn to the outdoor sales area. She figured she had already gone over her monthly book budget, but...

...This will help me learn English!

Her excuse was perfect. If she could not trick even herself, she could never become a politician. She just barely managed to resist reserving copies of all the major titles, but she could not help but buy up the books that had not been translated into Far Eastern or had the translation stop partway through the series.

As she searched about, she thought.

...I wonder if Aoi and Horizon are actually discussing their stance for the future.

She trusted them enough to not assume they were simply messing around. After all, Musashi had a meeting with England after the party that evening. Trade and political deals would be discussed there, so it would act as the basis of Musashi's future dealings with other nations and the Testament Union.

“If possible, I hope to form an alliance with England.”

But before she could think about that, she needed Aoi, who was their leader, and Horizon, who was a Logismo Oplo holder, to decide on their stance. And if the meeting with England would determine Musashi's future direction...

...This is our last chance to hesitate on this decision.

If those two did not come to a decision, the meeting would only discuss trade, Musashi would accomplish nothing on the political front, and they would either continue on to the next port or remain in England. They would then lose the time and power they needed to make allies before the Peace of Westphalia.

And so Masazumi wanted those two to reach their decision by the evening.

“But their first date in ten years is important on the personal side of things.”

Masazumi realized she had a tendency to think about this from a public position because she had not known those two for long. But the others were a bit different. Kimi, Asama, and Mitotsudaira had parted ways with her, but it had seemed they were planning to tail Aoi and Horizon.

...What are you, their parents?

But as Masazumi wandered through the aisles of books, she felt a bit disappointed that she had missed out on that.

The surrounding voices were louder outside than inside the warehouse.

...That's probably because of the people in charge of guiding people into the warehouses.

She listened in and heard one person near the abbey.

“Okay, okay, okay! Next up is a rare item! This used doujinshi is titled ‘Musashi Vice President’s Coming of Age Ceremony’!”

“Is this some new kind of harassment!?”

She ran toward the voice, but she heard a noise from the sky as she did.

It was the ringing of a bell. It came from a giant white building visible nearby. The abbey was known for its great height, so just looking at it made one want to tilt one’s head up.

...The bell sounds like a school’s chime.

As she thought, a sudden trembling tickled at the right side of her neck.

It came from her Mouse. It seemed the chiming noise had startled the young anteater inside the hard point part on her neck. But instead of coming out, it restrained itself and stopped moving

...I’m still not used to this.

She slowed her pace as she wondered if the shaking of her body had startled the Mouse. She might miss her chance to confiscate the doujinshi about her, but she had no other choice.

And so she walked alongside the bookstore stands set up in front of the abbey. The stands in question were positioned across from the abbey’s entrance. There were stands by her and in front of her and she could hear the bell ringing through the sky.

However...

“...?”

Something seemed odd to her.

This was Masazumi's first time in England or any place like this, but her heart sensed something uncomfortable that did not have to do with being in a foreign land.

...What is this?

A festival was underway and she was in a used book market. The people were checking the products at the different stands whether they intended to purchase something or not, but something else bothered Masazumi.

...First of all, something is odd about the abbey.

Westminster Abbey was the headquarters of the Anglican Church, England's Protestant church. It would only be natural for people to line up there during a festival.

"But no one's there."

The abbey had a few different large doors on the front and she currently stood in front of the central one, but it was closed and she heard no noises or voices that would indicate people inside. And...

"..."

She looked around at the used book stands set up around the plaza.

...Something isn't right.

Why were there even more customers outside?

"Why are they looking toward me? And wouldn't there usually be more people at the center of the market than outside?"

She initially thought she was being overly self-conscious about the people's gazes, but it became abundantly clear once she moved a bit. Every single one of the customers at the stands was looking her way and they turned their heads to follow her slightest movement.

As she wondered what was going on, the bell stopped ringing.

As the lingering noise vanished, Masazumi realized the customers at the stands and the people in the park had all stopped moving and speaking. Silence and stillness had fallen over the area. No, it was not completely still. The unavoidable movements of nature remained. The wind rustled through the grass and the clouds flowed through the sky.

...Everyone is looking at me.

Their faces were not expressionless. They had a cross between a smile and the expectant look of someone who thought they would smile soon.

Masazumi wondered what was going on. Why was this happening, when had it begun, and how were her comrades? With that last question in mind, she pulled out her handheld shrine. The Aoi sister, Mitotsudaira, and their group would be nearby, so they could quickly meet up if they decided on a meet-up point and ran. But a certain ink-like text appeared on the handheld shrine's display panel.

...Connection failed?

“ ... ”

The loss of any means of contact sent a chill down her spine. The Mouse at her neck had not grown attached to her yet, so it could not form a proper link with her.

...What is going to happen? ...No, what should I do?

As she worried, the central double-doors to the abbey forcefully opened behind her and a hoarse voice shouted out.

“Ladiiiiiies aaaaaaand gentlemeeeeennnnnnn!!”

The person who had opened the large doors with enough force to whip up the wind went on to raise his arms to either side.

...A Living Bones!?

He wore an English uniform. The Living Bones wore a cloak over the uniform and he shook the priest's hat on his head while ignoring the sound of the doors slamming into the wall on his left and right.

“Have a nice deeeeath! I am Lord Chancellor and Trumps 3! Christopher Hatton at your deadly service!!”

As Lord Chancellor Christopher Hatton introduced himself from a distance of about ten meters, Masazumi was temporarily left completely speechless.

...Um...

She had never seen him before, but she knew about him. Christopher Hatton had begun as one of Queen Elizabeth's guards and risen to the position of Lord Chancellor, a religious judge with extralegal authority. He had been a dandy who enjoyed dance and his name had been inherited by one of the Living Bones elite in the modern world.

Currently, Hatton was sliding forward through the air with his head tilted slightly upwards and his arms spread. He looked like someone giving a speech.

“Hello, auuuuuuudience! On this wonderful day, I would like to act as the MC and preach a killer sermon to you unsaved people!!

He seemed to be completely ignoring Masazumi, but he continued his sliding motion toward her. He continued looking up into the sky rather than at her or the other people, but his bony hands suddenly shot down toward her shoulders.

“...!?”

She was not trained in combat, so she was slow to react. She was unable to defend in the slightest and his strike to the shoulders half-forced her to turn toward the plaza.

While giving off a hollow and cold presence behind her, Hatton spoke.

“Now, people! I and everyone else who live in the Fairy Queen’s England are ecological pigs who still use the streets and buildings from the long-dead Roman age! But we are also nice pigs, so I would like to call us gentleman pigs and lady pigs! But if I did that, we would be here until you were in your graves, so I will end that now!!”

As she wondered what was happening, Masazumi raised her hands to show she was not trying to resist. She made sure not to drop the bag of books under her arm while she listened to Hatton.

“Buuuut! Pigs, listen to meeeee!! I know the truth! The pigs of the other nations of Europe are also dead-set on taking care of and relying on the Roman age!”

That’s true, silently agreed Masazumi.

A lot of the cities, streets, and waterways made during the Roman age were still used and the large cities of different areas across Europe were based on those things. This remained the same even after the collapse of the harmonic world. The cities and structures within the nations’ harmonic territories had been referenced when recreating those nations on Far Eastern land.

But Hatton added to his previous words. And his addition began with a word of denial.

“But, but, but, buuuuut! I know something else as well! Our nation of England values the Roman age, but we should become new age shamans as well! ...Oh, but a holy man shouldn’t use the word shaman! Forget I said that! Put the memory to death!!”

Masazumi wondered if it was a bad thing that her strongest reaction was hoping she was not infected by his way of speaking. As she mentally tilted her head, she heard Hatton raise his arms a bit.

“England is newwww! But what about it is new, hmmm!?! Shout out the answer! Make it a bloodcurdling scream!”

The workers and customers at the festival stands all swung up their right hands in unison.

“The Anglican Church!!”

“A deadly good answer!!” shouted Hatton. She heard him spread his arms wide. “Let’s get divorced!!”

Masazumi heard everyone let out a shout.

The cheer was quite loud, but Hatton clacked his hand bones together as if to say it was not enough.

“Divorce! In less than a second’s time, the bonds between husband and wife can be put six feet under! Buuuut! There is no sadness, no crying, and no suicide! By severing those legal bonds, you, me, and all the other pigs and non-pigs that god has overpopulated this world with can hold hands in deadly harmony!

“Divorce! In the old age without it, the only bonds were those between husband, wife, child, and descendent! Buuuut! With divorce, once can form bonds with many, many more people! Nice job, Henry VIII! Buuut! Does this mean death for the bonds between us!?”

...That is a good point.

Marriage was a bond with legal meaning, but people could join together even without that legal meaning. And on top of that, England had used the Anglican Church to give people the ability to cut the bond of marriage.

That was why the Lord Chancellor was asking if this meant the end of people's bonds.

“Hah hah,” laughed Hatton behind her. “That is not the caaaaase! They are everywhere around us! The fatal mistake lies in using the term ‘bond’!!”

Masazumi listened.

“Laws! Contracts! Leases! Even without such things, there are always bonds between people! Even if you try to cut them, you will find yourself unable! After all, we do not even forget those who are dead! We cannot forget an idiot even if they die!”

He loudly clapped his bony hands once.

“But the people were amazing lost lambs! And so they made documents, made contracts, and got so narcissistic that they would not believe it unless their father did karaoke at the wedding! But the Roman age is long dead! The amazing lambs passed through the age of pigs and will eventually become cows! They will ultimately reach the age of judgment and they will achieve victory when the referee judges on the side of the home team! After that, the age of pork will be overcome and the age of beef will arrive! Once they achieve that wonderful marbling, everyone will believe in the bonds between people even without a word spoken! With the introduction of divorce, England has now brought death to the lamb and carried the pork out to the marketplace! Now is the pork age! But after the difficulties of haggling down the price just before the shop closes, tomorrow it will be beef for sale! And what has England gained in this new age!?”

Well... thought Masazumi.

And as soon as she came up with the answer, Hatton shouted it out.

“A new lawwww! Brought to you by me, the Lord Chancellor! Unlike the civil law that Europe has used since the old age, England's laws have had a deadly unique feature! Just like in the Roman age, the countries of Europe use civil law which follows established laws and texts! Buuuut! Since the age of lamb,

England's laws are built up on precedent! And that is known as common law!
Are you listening!? Common law! Common law! Common lawwww!"

As Hatton chanted, everyone else joined in while swinging up their arms up again and again.

"Common law! Common law!! Common law!!!"

...Is this chant supposed to be mocking!?

But Masazumi did not say anything because she did not want to agitate another nation's judicial representative.

And then Hatton began speaking once more.

"Okay, audience!! We are pigs now! That is the current age! By charging headlong into divorce and other changes, English law has reached a deadly limit! The limit is here! And so the position of Lord Chancellor has been given a certain authority! Aaaaand! That authority is equityyyyy!"

He went on to explain the meaning of equity.

"Some special cases cannot be handled with common law which is built on precedent! Rather than let those special cases haunt us, the Lord Chancellor resolves them using equity which transcends common law! Now England can resolve anything without being fatally bound by old cases and legacy laws! But England has also not killed those old cases and legacy laws! After all, this is equity! A similar word existed in the dead Roman age!"

The festival stand workers responded by forcefully throwing their hands in the air. Their hands held pikes made of rusty metal and they shouted in unison.

"Equites!!"

They raised their weapons and swung them around as if scraping at the heavens.

"Our new law!!" they shouted.

They let out a great cheer.

“Our new equites!! No...”

The festival stand workers turned around, revealing their faces, bodies, and arms.

...Living Dead and Living Bones!?

“Yeahhhh!!!” they all shouted. “The old equites living on in our new England!!”

“That is deadly accurate!” shouted back Hatton. He stood before the cheering knights while speaking word by word as if pointing to each of them in turn.

“Haaaave! Yooouuuu! Seeeeen! Theeee!! Liiiiiight!?”

“No light! No resting in peace!! Nobody rests in peace!!”

“Okay, listen to meeee! Repeat after meeee!!”

“Listen to yooouuuu! Repeat after yooouuu!”

In that instant, Masazumi could have sworn the Lord Chancellor took in an impossible breath.

“An idiot cannot be cured even by deeeeeeath!!”

“An idiot cannot be cured even by deeeeeeath!!”

“Now then,” said Hatton just as Masazumi felt a sudden impact.

Hatton’s bony hands had grabbed her shoulders.

...Eh?

Before she could even wonder what was happening, Hatton shouted out.

“But what about a clever girl!?”

“She *will* be cured by deeeeeeath!!”

As they shouted in joy, the ancient knights raised their spears.

“The bonds between people are everywhere! We just cannot see them!!”

“We are all idiots, so we cannot rest in peace even after our deaths!”

“But if a clever girl dies with us, that bond will let us rest in peace!!”

...*Eh?*

Masazumi had more or less grasped their argument, so she frantically shouted back.

“Wait! I’m not all that clever!”

They all fell silent. A bit of strength left the arms of the knights raising their spears. And then one of the knights moved his dry teeth and jaw to ask a question.

“What was your score on your third term health class exam in your second year?”

“Eh?”

She tried to remember.

“...87?”

Everyone looked toward Hatton behind her. She also glanced up at him and saw the skeleton Lord Chancellor nod deeply toward the others.

“Such a high score! For the crime of perversion, I sentence you to deeeeeeath!!”

“I’ve never heard such a terrible excuse!!”

“Shut up! Thou shalt not be perverted! In the Tsirhc religion, it is customary for everyone to get zero points on their exams in health class! But turning in a blank paper would be foolish, so we all work hard to make pure and proper mistakes!

And since you got the right answers, you are guilty of perversion!! And so I cast my judgment as Lorrerrd Chancellorrrrr!! Teh leh leh teh leh leh!!”

Hatton wore a necklace made of several compressed skulls and they flashed while singing along with his jingle. As soon the light stopped, Hatton spoke.

“I sentence you to deeeeeeeath!!”

“You just wanted to say death, didn’t you!?”

She protested, but the knights let out a cry and charged forward with their spears at the ready.

“Diiiiie!!”

“W-wait a second! Can you really rest in peace like this!?”

She turned toward Hatton and found his necklace was flashing again. The frequency of the flashing was accelerating.

“Time to explode! Time to rest in peace!” shouted the necklace’s skulls.

“Y-you almost tricked me by going so over the top, but that’s annihilation, not resting in peace!! And Lord Chancellor! You’ll be blown away as well!! And even if you aren’t, you’ll be skewered by the spears!”

As she spoke, a figure ran out from the abbey. The figure had no head, but it was a Living Bones wearing the same cloak and uniform as Hatton. The headless Living Bones stood behind Hatton, gently grabbed Hatton’s skull with its bony fingers, and removed it.

“Ah,” said Masazumi. “Y-you can swap out bodies!?”

“Have a nice deeeeeeeath!”

Hatton’s new body dashed away with the head under his arm. The remaining body continued holding Masazumi’s shoulders and her face stiffened as the spears approached.

“...!!”

In the next instant, Hatton sank down a bit next to the abbey.

He extended one leg out to the side, rotated both his arms, and stretched them out parallel with his outstretched leg.

“Resting in peace is the keyword that binds this world with the next! Using a death sentence allowed by equity, I, Lord Chancellor Christopher Hatton, can cause an overwhelming number of restless spirits to rest in peace in only 0.05 seconds! And you can watch that deadly process now!”

He twisted the arms sticking out to either side. The instant he pointed both thumbs downwards, the headless body holding Masazumi was pierced by dozens of spears. The cloth of its uniform flew through the air and the tips of the spears protruded from its back like a pincushion.

“Dance Revolution!!”

An explosion of white light appeared in front of the abbey.

“Now then.”

A half-dragon stood on a main street of the festival. He muttered to himself while scratching the aileron in front of his throat.

“That sounded like an explosion in the distance, but did I just imagine it? Have I finally been so influenced by those strange people that I am constantly hearing loud noises in my head?”

That half-dragon with a blue and white outer shell was Urquiaga. He stopped walking, folded his arms, and tilted his head.

“Everyone else seems to be having fun, so did the others start ostracizing me at some point?”

The half-dragon’s sharp eyes turned toward the wall of people that covered the road yet kept its distance. They were all looking at him. Their gazes were filled with expectation and interest, but Urquiaga turned a half-lidded glare in their direction.

“Hey,” he called out.

The entire crowd responded.

“_____!”

It was a mixture of cheers, feminine cries, and laughter. It eventually lowered to a stir and finally became an expectant silence once more. Urquiaga did not know why only he was here or why everyone was unconditionally expecting something of him.

But there was one thing he did know.

...It’s them!

He recognized some of the faces in the nearest portion of the wall of people. He saw Ohiroshiki, Hassan, Noriki, and Noriki’s younger brothers and sisters. He did not know why, but they were fully a part of the crowd.

“_____!”

Whenever something happened, they would immediately raise their arms and shout out. Ohiroshiki was the easiest to understand.

“Ohhhh! Uquiii! Uqui! Uquiii!! Come over here!!”

In his attempt to stand out more than anyone else in the crowd, he waved his arms around and jumped up and down with such force that it looked like he would burst a blood vessel. Urquiaga honestly found it disturbing. Next to Ohiroshiki, Hassan held a giant plate above his head.

“Curry!!”

Urquiaga had no idea what was going on. Curry had nothing to do with the festival and Hassan’s usual expressionless face only made it worse. Incidentally, Noriki and his siblings were a problem as well.

“Wow! It’s a monster! Look, it’s a monster!” shouted one of the younger ones.
“Hurry up and destroy the city and then explode!!”

Urquiaga felt that was a very self-contained idea of a monster, but then he turned to Noriki. The boy was as silent and expressionless as ever.

“ ... ”

He raised and lowered his arms along with the crowd around him. His complete silence and lack of expression made the sudden movements of his arms seem very suspicious. After looking at those three classmates, Urquiaga tilted his head.

...This must be some form of brainwashing. Judge. It has to be.

He wanted to check to see if they were brainwashed, but that presented a problem.

...No one would be stupid enough to say ‘yes’ if I asked if they are brainwashed. Someone must be sending a brainwashing signal across the festival and it has messed with everyone’s brain. A devout Catholic such as myself has escaped its effects due to my Catholic barrier. Long live Catholicism. Now then. Time to ignore the crazy people and search out a non-brainwashed older sister character.

But someone suddenly spoke to the side.

“Ahhh! My opponent is a monster! How scary!”

Urquiaga turned to the left to see what this was about.

...A seal!?

It was a giant seal engraved with the mirror image of Far Eastern for “England”. It was large enough to wrap one’s arms around.

“I’m Nicholas Bacon of Trumps!!”

That cheerful voice was accompanied by the seal flying toward Urquiaga.

The voice gathered even more energy.

“Take this!!”

“Oh, it sounds like someone else is having an exciting time.”

Naito felt the vibration in the street and the sound of swords. Their locations were spatially harmonized, so they should not have had any direct connections. The fact that she could sense an influence from outside meant the theatre spell was not perfect.

“If I am right, this is a theatre space and our battlefields are spatially adjacent stages. In that case...”

...These noises I’m hearing are from the others’ battles. I hope they’re okay.

As she muttered in her heart, she opened the long case she had been resting on her shoulder and she pulled a broom out.

Light was already wrapped around the broom’s Orei Metallo. It was the deep red indicating a warning. That signal normally meant she was approaching a ship’s barrier while she was in flight.

Naito produced a speedometer-type Magie Figur in place of a sign frame and used it to operate the broom. She cancelled the warning, shifted it into flight preparation mode, and activated the resonance detection just in case.

...Just as I thought, Ga-chan isn’t here.

Weiss Fräulein's Verstärken Schale had been destroyed during the Battle of Mikawa, but the pen that formed its foundation was intact. That was why she had hoped Schwarz Fräulein could resonate with it, but it seemed the theatre space was not so kind.

She was worried about Naruze. After all, the Verstärken Schale and Technohexen outfit came from the storage space as a set, so she could not change into the Technohexen outfit that provided defense and the bodily fixation needed for aerial mobility.

Also...

“Ga-chan can be quite stubborn.”

Naito felt it was both a positive and a negative that Naruze felt there was something “lacking” about her actions.

When it worked in a positive way, it made her a diligent worker and gave her a kindness that bordered on overprotectiveness. But when it worked in a negative way, she would be too quick to bare her fangs toward others and she would corner herself with pointless effort.

...She seems to be in the pointless effort mode this time.

Naito adjusted her three-cornered hat and lowered her shoulders a bit.

“And I'm the cause...”

As she muttered to herself, she brought the broom's Orei Metallo toward her forehead and yet raised her eyebrows.

“Verwandlung!” she shouted. “Schwarz Fräulein!”

Her wish was answered by a roar and the reliable expansion of her equipment.

It came. First, a string of characters rushed across a sign frame.

“Expanding allotted space. Everyone, please be careful.”

In the next instant, Schwarz Fräulein's outfit was summoned behind her and surrounded her. In exchange, the clothes she wore were removed and reverse-summoned away.

Her skin was exposed for just an instant, but the black clothes wrapped tightly around her body in the next moment. And...

“Come, Schwarz Fräulein!”

In response to her cry, components for a black steel cowl were spatially fired around her wooden broom which floated in the air.

Just as the clothes fixed in place around her body, Schwarz Fräulein's parts moved into place and bolts were fired into them.

All that remained was for everything to be fixed in place. A harmony of metallic noises rang out and the final bolt was driven into place.

“...!”

Naito immediately flew up into the sky.

...What is going on!?

She wanted to investigate some things. What were the characteristics of this space that had been altered by a spell? How large was it? Did it have walls that acted as boundaries? And was it possible to destroy the spell or escape it? Analyzing this type of spell was the specialty of the Technohexen who had been forced to oppose persecution. Schwarz Hexen used attenuating magic, so they were the ones to destroy, stop, or build countermeasures against spells. She was the perfect person for this job.

And so she flew. The primary reason for flying was to escape an enemy's attacks.

...But I also have to determine the extent of the spell's effects.

Naito was rising vertically, but she suddenly collided with something.

It was the surface of a body of water.

“...!?”

It was invisible, but a thick expanse of ocean had indeed fallen down from the sky.

After striking that water in the air, Naito drew out her full speed beyond the massive wall of water. The spray felt like an impact and the pressure of the water seemed to grope at her entire body and her wings.

“Kah...!”

Due to its narrow form, Schwarz Fräulein stabbed into the water and continued on. It started to slip from between her legs, but it quickly stalled and seemed to fall onto a thick blanket.

...Air!

As her body doubled over from the impact, air slipped from her body and within her hair. That air then moved toward the ground below. The way the current wrapped the water around her made it difficult to open her eyes. Her lungs begged for air as she trembled from the impact, but only the blood-like flavor of seawater filled her mouth.

As she sat in the ocean that made it difficult to spread her wings, Naito thought about what this was.

...This is probably a virtual ocean created by a spell.

She had been careless. As soon as she had been brought into the theatre space, she had assumed she would duel someone there, but her opponent had brought the ocean with them for the battlefield. And that ocean filled the sky to prevent her from flying.

The water making up this ocean was likely the same as the virtual ocean surface that the Musashi used to float.

But the ocean in the sky here was thick. Now that her body had settled in place and merely gave off air bubbles, she felt an impassable thickness in the ocean around her.

She could only think of one reason to prepare an ocean so much thicker than the one the Musashi used.

...To swim.

As Naito held Schwarz Fräulein which had stalled in the ocean, a voice confirmed the answer in her heart. It came from a trail of white bubbles cutting through the water to her right.

“Do you understand? This is the large instant training pool used by Oxford’s ship club!”

A man holding a long trident charged toward her while swimming Vassallo-style. He had a sign frame which displayed a mermaid.

“I am Hawkins, the ship club swim team captain and Trumps 5-2.”

“And I am Cavendish, ship club aide and 5-3!”

As she heard the two of them speak, Naito held Schwarz Fräulein as if embracing it within the heavy water.

In the next instant...

“Today we will be battling while swimming!!”

Hawkins’s trident stabbed directly toward her throat.

As danger approached her, Naito thought about the fact that her partner was likely facing an enemy as well.

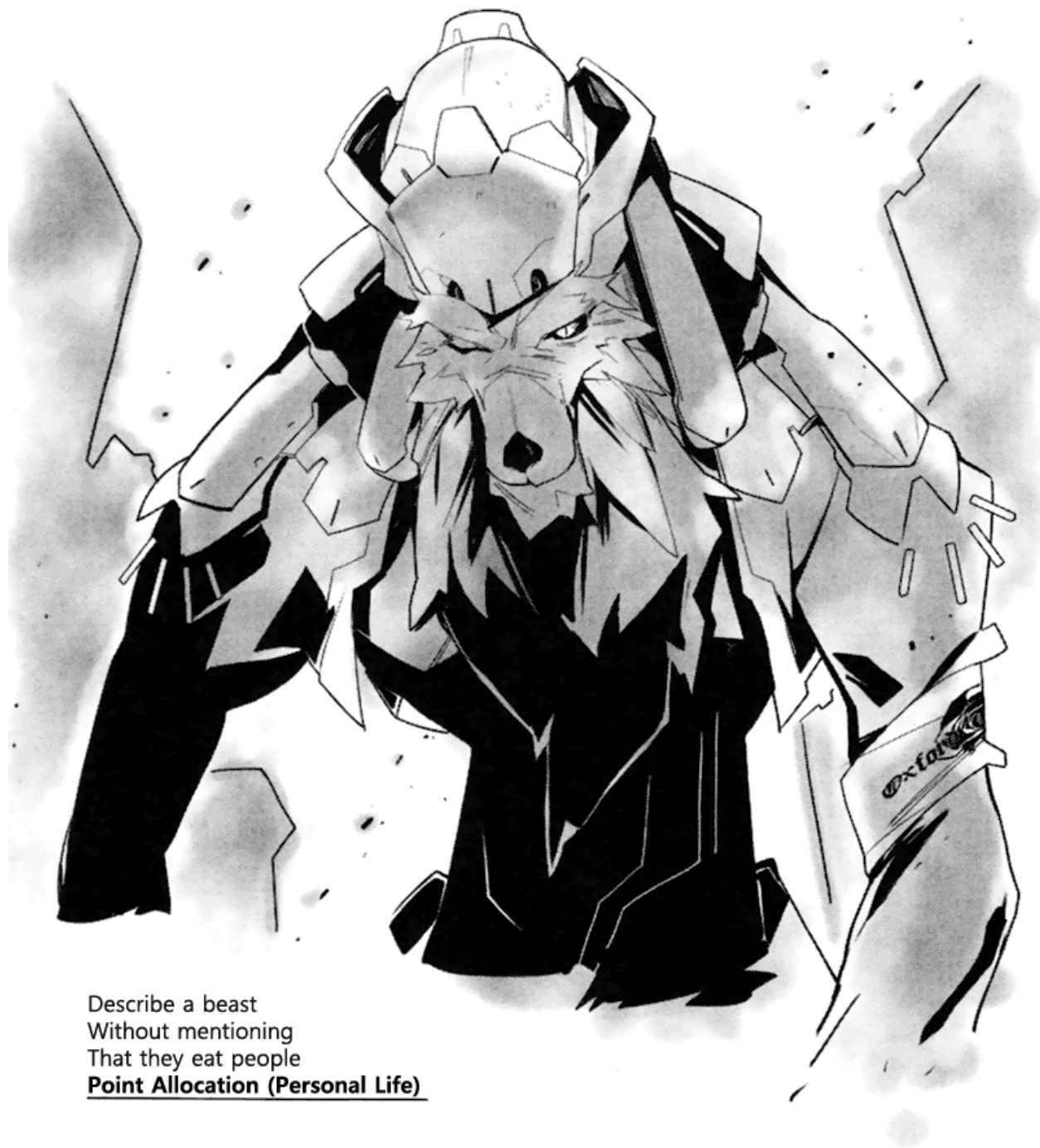
...*Ga-chan!*

She hoped Naruze was not matched up with too bad an opponent.

Chapter 30: Humanitarian of the Hunting Ground

CHAPTER 30

"Humanitarian of the Hunting Ground"



Describe a beast
Without mentioning
That they eat people
Point Allocation (Personal Life)

Describe a beast

Without mentioning

That they eat people

Point Allocation (Personal Life)

Two people faced each other below the blue sky.

Two non-humans stood on a dirt road in the city.

One was a girl with six black wings and the other was a Hard Wolf who roughly wore an English uniform.

The bipedal Hard Wolf used his fingers to lightly tap the bayonet pirate hat on his head.

“I am Drake, 5-1 and member of the ship club. Could you give me a bit of your time?”

The girl was already wrinkling her brow and she did not try to hide the displeasure in her voice.

“I am Malga Naruze, fourth special duty officer. What does England’s hero of the sea want with me?”

“Now, now.” Drake took a half step back, held out his left hand, and gave an exaggerated shake of the head. “No need to get so angry. To be honest, this situation is not very good for either of us. It is not very good at all. Especially for me.”

“What? What’s bad about it?” Naruze spoke through clenched teeth while turning her body to the side. “I’m worried about Margot, so stop stalling for time.”

As she spoke, two things happened.

First, Drake brought a hand to his forehead as if in response to some kind of mistake.

Second, Naruze's right foot slipped and she rotated around halfway.

“Eh?”

She fell to the ground wings first. She did not hit her head, but it had been so sudden that she sat in a daze for a few seconds. Finally, she frantically spread her wings to the side and stood up.

“Wh-what was that!?”

“It was this. Take a look at my hand.”

Drake held up his right hand which bore a giant silver gauntlet.

Naruze recognized the sparkling silver object.

“England's Testamenta Arma!?”

“Dudley uses the left hand and I use the right. This is Brachium Justitia – Vetus. You just experienced its effect.” The Hard Wolf nodded. “Anyone who attempts to disturb England's justice will fail.”

Upon hearing Drake's explanation, Naruze immediately took action.

She used the pen in her right hand to open an A4-size crop mark frame Magie Figur in the air.

...It might interfere with an incantation.

A silver coin fell from her sleeve and into her palm. She fired it with a spell playback rather than an incantation.

But just before the silver coin was fired...

“Loading type : Failure : An error occurred while activating the spell. Retry?”

With a quiet warning tone, the silver coin flew through the air and struck her on the cheek.

“Ow,” she said while grabbing the coin from the air.

...Nothing's changed?

It was not being controlled by ether or a spell. It was simply...

“Have you ever heard of a jinx? It's like a small curse. You know what I mean, right? Those superstitions about a crow cawing behind you or a black cat crossing your path.”

“A lot of them are related to Technohexen and our familiars.”

“Testament.”

Drake nodded, so Naruze nodded back.

“Does it create a jinx that makes people fail when they oppose the justice of England?”

“Testament. Annoyingly enough, the queen gave this to me when she dubbed me a knight for attacking a Tres Españan fleet and bringing back a national budget's worth of gold.”

“I don't want to listen to you brag about your strength. And why is that annoying? You have an unbeatable power. Are you not attacking me because you know you can't lose?”

“There is a downside. I find this very difficult to deal with.”

Drake then motioned her over.

Naruze was cautious, but any of her attacks would be neutralized. She cast a few spells to protect herself to see if they would be repelled too.

“Where are we going?”

“Somewhere where I can speak.”

“Do I not get a say?”

“If you try to attack me, a Nightmare will charge out at you or a bee will sting you.”

After his threat of headless horses and insects, the Hard Wolf pointed toward a table set under an arcade. The audience was fixated on them, but they kept their distance and opened a path. The Hard Wolf walked over and sat on the opposite side of the shaded table set.

Naruze hesitated briefly, but finally stood across the table from Drake.

“What is it? Are you afraid of me?”

“Not really. I just do not want to mistakenly trap myself in your justice.”

“Then I’ll pay. That’ll work, right?” he asked while resting his head on his hand.

Naruze frowned, but sat down. She turned the chair back to the side so she could immediately spread her wings if need be.

“What do you wish to talk about?”

“Let’s start with our drinks. ...But that’s just because I want something to drink.”

“Coffee.”

“Oh, the latest trend? I’ll have milk. Unprocessed milk.”

When she only gave him a cold glare, the Hard Wolf shrugged.

A cup of coffee and a mug of milk soon floated over to them. The wolf grabbed the mug.

“Just to be clear, milk is a transformed state of blood. England’s blood-sucking races love it too. Blood is expensive and has to be bought at specialty shops, but milk is available pretty much everywhere.”

“Is an English knight strapped for...”

Just as she was going to say “cash”, something landed on her cheek.

It was a bee. A large bee.

The sensation of the moving insect’s legs on her cheek caused Naruze’s wings to shudder. Drake shrugged again in front of her.

“Do you see now? It even regulates comments that would damage our justice. I really do find it to be an annoyance.”

As he spoke, the bee rubbed her cheek with its thick body and then flew away as if striking her with its wings. Once she could finally start breathing again, Naruze shook her head once and glared at Drake. Her gaze said he was her enemy.

“Sorry, sorry. The coffee is on me, so you can at least thank me.”

“Danke.”

Drake whistled when she used German. He went on to form a smile at the corner of his mouth.

“You really are a great Technohexen. It’s been a while since I wanted to cook someone and eat them. What do you taste like? Tell me.”

“Is it true that the lupine races are man-eaters?”

“Testament.”

He nodded and pulled a license out of his uniform's breast pocket. It said, "Food License – Human Meat, Including: Consenting humans, meat for sale".

"Most of the former Saxons and those from Hexagone Française are like that. There are over 270 werewolf-related crimes in Hexagone Française every year, so you can see how difficult it is to suppress. The Jean Grenier incident occurred in Hexagone Française's city of Bordeaux recently. In accordance with the history recreation, half-beasts with a man-eating nature will now be referred to as lycanthropes."

"The ogres are protesting their inclusion, aren't they? They claim they are not beasts because they cook people before eating them. I'm not sure how I should laugh at that."

"You can just hang your head and laugh. ...Oh, but I guess I'm not one to talk here."

Naruze almost agreed, but then she began to search her surroundings for a bee. She also looked down at her feet in case there was a scorpion or snake there, but she saw no sign of danger.

"Are you going to eat me?" she asked with a weary sigh.

"I would if you consented. As a knight, I am also a gentleman. I even get down on one knee to ask my wife. She loves poetry."

"Your wife?"

"This is a world of give-and-take. As long as you have money, you can buy powerful healing spells. I am rich and there are people who think they must be hurt to belong in this world. My wife is one of those people."

"..."

"She says I am wonderful because I do not hesitate."

"Are you going to cheat on her with a chicken?"

“Sorry, but you’d be the hors d’oeuvres. Not even I can afford to hesitate when it comes to my wife.”

Naruze did not bother asking why. Nor was she shocked by the answer she came to.

“Your wife is a murderer, isn’t she?”

“Yes, she has strong inclinations in that direction. If I don’t rip into her, she starts ripping into me. Before we met, she went to a rehab facility called ‘On the Chopping Block’ where Living Dead who liked being torn apart would volunteer. They of course had a yakiniku restaurant at which I was a frequent customer.”

“So it was a cruel and emotional meeting? How did you propose?”

“That was perfectly normal. While eating the yakiniku I told her ‘I love you. You’re the best.’ She responded with ‘Take as much as you want’.”

“To be blunt, why don’t you go ahead and die? If you have a happy marriage, I think you’ll end up dying before long anyway.”

“Testament. She does sometimes get me good. I used to climb on top of her a lot and she would cut my chest to pieces with a hidden knife. It wasn’t too bad since Hard Wolves can’t be hurt much without silver weapons and we heal quickly, but both of us would end up eating too much back then.”

Naruze decided she and Margot should try to be that into each other.

“But,” said Drake. “Does your knight have the same habits?”

Our “knight” would be Mitotsudaira, thought Naruze. She’s half werewolf and half human, but she can’t transform into a beast and she doesn’t eat people. I think. I hope. Well, at any rate...

“She likes beef that is grade 4 or higher.”

“If she married a half-bullman she would have to build an underground labyrinth and that sounds like a lot of work.”

“She has money and she can earn more, so she can always just buy one. But why do you ask?”

“Testament,” he said. “There is something I want to ask you. I assume you have at least heard of Joan of Arc.”

She had. During the Hundred Years’ War, that girl had freed Hexagone Française as it was on the verge of being conquered by England. But...

“What does that have to do with Mitotsudaira?”

If he wanted to speak with a fellow man-eater, the French non-human races would be ideal. After all...

“Joan of Arc was Hexagone Française’s hero during the Hundred Years’ War and her subordinate, Gilles de Rais, was an ogre. Similarly, Hexagone Française’s non-human races have always been mostly man-eaters. Joan of Arc was not, but she was still a non-human. Using the restored rights of non-humans as a shield, she went through with the history recreation while knowing it would lead to her being burned at the stake. And during the Hundred Years’ War, England occupied northern and central Hexagone Française. To recover that land, Joan of Arc formed a unit of man-eaters, so England’s forces were destroyed without being able to send their main force of humanoid non-humans to the front lines. However, the people of Hexagone Française were afraid of them as well, so the king had to personally handle the triumphant return to the reclaimed land.”

“You know a lot about this.”

“I lived in M.H.R.R. where a lot of those people live.”

“I see,” said Drake. “But there’s something I want to ask about. It’s about my grandfather.”

“Your grandfather?”

“Testament. He was on the English side of that war, but a question remains. According to what he told me, it’s possible Joan of Arc escaped being burned at the stake.”

“Joan of Arc escaped being burned at the stake?”

Naruze could do nothing but repeat his words, so Drake continued on.

“For my grandfather, it was a war between fellow members of the same race. Even while recreating history, they wanted to avoid non-human sacrifices. Joan of Arc was to be executed in Rouen, which was English territory at the time, but carrying out the execution would advance the history recreation leading to Hexagone Française’s victory. That was why England sent out an unofficial unit to take her away. My grandfather was a part of that unit.”

“Wait a minute.” Naruze placed a finger on her forehead, frowned, and asked a question while thinking this was ridiculous. “If what you are saying is true, should you really be revealing it here?”

“Testament. No one will believe it. After all, my grandfather claimed to be a knight of the Testament Cross-Borders Unit.”

Naruze realized what he meant when he used the term Testament Cross-Borders Unit. That was an elite group said to exist in each nation. Whenever a crisis or problem appeared somewhere in the world, they would rush out and resolve it while completely ignoring the rules of the history recreation.

“That unit came from the Plan to Combat Decline and Advance Tuning that humanity agreed to at the beginning of the history recreation, right? That plan led to the creation of the Testament and the harmonic world, and it decided on the rules for the history recreation. But it also created the Testament Cross-Borders Unit in each nation for when the history recreation would be impossible or the world would be destroyed and someone had to do something. Isn’t that right?”

“Testament. This world led by the Testament was brought about by the Plan to Combat Decline and Advance Tuning that the people agreed to in ancient times. They wanted the age to continue on without rest. Only the basic principles remain nowadays, but the Catholics and the Testament Union act based on those founding principles. And the Testament Cross-Borders Unit was created to ensure the history recreation could continue, but its very existence is denied because it does not fit into the flow of history. Its name remains in every nation, but no one belongs to it.

“Due to the disasters all over the place after the Harmonic Unification War, a lot of liars have been showing up who claim to be from Testament Cross-Borders Unit families. They want their name to mean something, but they never give a straight answer once someone tries to dig deeper into their past. And that’s how people will view me.”

“Judge. Nothing specific is known about the unit and it sounds like something from a cheap novel. I’m sure you believe your grandfather, but do you have any proof he was telling the truth? Also, isn’t it against the rules of the Testament Cross-Borders Unit to try to capture Joan of Arc for England’s sake? If that is true, your grandfather will have two reasons for people to deny his existence, so why do you believe him?”

“That’s simple. England wasn’t the only group trying to rescue Joan of Arc. Arthur de Richemont, supporter of Joan of Arc and the non-human commander-in-chief who successfully restored their rights, had a private army that disappeared the day before Joan of Arc’s execution.”

Which meant...

“My grandfather told me that a force in Hexagone Française was working with them. He said it was Hexagone Française’s Testament Cross-Borders Unit and that they might have saved Joan of Arc.” Drake laughed. “In the name of the history recreation, an insider leaked information concerning the mission to swipe Joan of Arc. My grandfather’s unit was attacked in Rouen and they didn’t make it in time. But they saw the white smoke of her being burned rising into the sky. My grandfather’s unit retreated, but I would always ask him a certain question when

he told me the story. I would ask him why his comrades in Hexagone Française didn't help them. I was so cruel."

However...

"He would always laugh and tell me this: 'I couldn't be helped, Drake. It couldn't be helped. We failed and history continued on as it should. Looking at it that way, our mistake was pretty amazing, wasn't it?' But..."

"But?"

"I understood. I could tell. He was saying he could only trust in them. He could only trust that they had indeed come to help and that it was unknown whether they had truly succeeded or failed. Was the smoke they saw rising the real deal? They may not have been able to save her, but what about their foreign comrades? He knew nothing for sure, but he had to trust in those with the same traits as him."

Hearing that, Naruze came to a slight understanding. This Hard Wolf was open about his man-eating trait because he had been so deeply dyed by his grandfather's words. But Naruze decided to ask a question while making sure she did not violate England's justice.

"But how can you determine the truth?"

Drake lightly held up his mug and pointed at her with it.

"I looked through the 1648 Chancellor's Officers Almanac. It said Nate Mitotsudaira comes from a family of knights for a small feudal lord, but that family came to the forefront once their son married a female werewolf who had no political position. Then their child was chosen to head the Mitotsudaira family. It's rumored there was a reason for that."

"In other words, a werewolf family belonging to the Testament Cross-Borders Unit lost any political position during the mission to rescue Joan of Arc, but they are being restored to power now?"

Naruze was not sure what to think. After all, Mitotsudaira had come to Musashi before elementary school.

“I am not sure she ever mentioned it and I would not remember even if she had.”

“Then I might be on the wrong track. The werewolf unit of the Hexagone Française liberation army was made up of legitimate man-eaters. If Musashi’s knight is not, then I might have to rethink this. Either way, I intend to go to Hexagone Française and investigate if I survive and retire.”

“Why not try asking Mitotsudaira?”

“Testament. I will if I feel like it. Once I’m done here, I have to immediately head out to hold Tres España in check to the west. Once I get back, it will be time for the armada battle, but I will have to defend England while you continue on to the next port, right?”

“Probably,” responded Naruze with a shrug. “But even if you can’t speak with her directly, I can ask her if I have some time. The Trumps’ divine network site has a divine message form, doesn’t it? I can send the answer through there, right?”

“Testament. I would appreciate it. I wanted to deal with her directly, but that wasn’t the duty I was given.”

Those words indicated a certain fact and Naruze calmly asked about it.

“So someone has been sent to duel Mitotsudaira? And they are more suited for the job than you?”

“That’s right.” The Hard Wolf loudly gulped down his milk and slammed the mug down on the table. “Kahhh! There’s nothing like some good milk.”

“Make sure to have your wife as a snack to go with it.” Naruze sipped at her coffee and put down the cup. “Now that we have finished drinking, it is time to get down to business, right?”

“Right.” Drake shrugged, stood up from his chair, and raised his gauntleted right hand. “Justice is a real pain. It devours everything that rebels.”

“So to avoid being devoured, one has to stab at that justice? That sounds like a job for a Technohexen.”

Naruze took a breath and moved lightly. She pushed down on her chair with her hands, floated up into the air, and lightly flapped her wings as if taking a step backwards in midair.

“Once I defeat you and celebrate with Naito, I will ask Mitotsudaira if her past is as romantic as you suggest.”

Chapter 31: Protector on the Round Stage

CHAPTER 31

"Protector on the Round Stage"



Why do dolls dance?
What do dolls think as they dance?
What do dolls use to dance?
Point Allocation (Opposition)

Why do dolls dance?

What do dolls think as they dance?

What do dolls use to dance?

Point Allocation (Opposition)

Mitotsudaira used the central street to run toward Soho.

The street was wide and an audience took shelter under the arcades on either side.

A plaza awaited down the road. Beyond the plaza were even more roads and plazas. And beyond them was...

...Oxford.

The edge of the first level towered above like a wall and stairs led up to the fortress-like main school building. To the right of the stairs was the Tower of London, but Mitotsudaira's interest lay elsewhere.

"This is the place."

Her heels clacked against the ground and her run came to a stop. She was inside a plaza with roads leading away in all four directions. It had a fountain in the center and tall buildings bordered it on all four sides.

However, it had festival stands and lots of people.

"..."

As she sighed and lowered her shoulders, her expression relaxed. A few words escaped her lips as she looked around the area.

"Based on their scent, those two stopped here on their date."

She did not know what they were doing at the moment, but she had a duty as a knight.

“I must quickly bring an end to this farce and guide my king and princess to a safe place.”

If possible, she wanted to keep the two of them together. If they could redo what they had missed ten years prior, it would no longer pain her king.

Also, if either one of them decided on their stance for the meeting that evening, Musashi could face that meeting with a solid foothold against England.

As Masazumi had mentioned, this would not end just with their meeting with England.

...This meeting will set the basis for how we approach the other nations and the Testament Union.

That was why this date was so important. Both for official and personal reasons, she could not allow anyone to interfere.

...And for me...

Ten years ago when Horizon had been lost and he had yet to return due to his injury, all of them had had their own thoughts. They had baselessly believed that the two of them would return, but she had not returned and they had very nearly lost him.

If Kimi had not been there, they would not have prevented the second loss. Their inability to stop those losses would have carved despair into their hearts.

But Horizon had now returned, even if she had lost a lot.

And so Mitotsudaira had a certain thought.

...I cannot...

She could not let them travel down the path of loss again. At the very least, she had no intention of losing the things she cared for, the things she wanted by her side, and the things she wanted to be with.

Her position as knight meant she could not be the most important thing to her king. But protecting her king and that which was most important to him was part of her pride as a knight.

And her protection included protecting Musashi's future.

So...

"The enemy closest to the king is the enemy I should deal with. Who are they?"

Mitotsudaira asked her question as she sat on the stones that formed the edge of the fountain in the center of the plaza.

She did not sit on the wooden benches on each side of the fountain. After all, she could smell her king two peoples' distance away.

The spot next to her king was for the one most important to him and it was too much for her, so she moved two spots over and sat.

But...

"There!"

Her left arm suddenly shot into the air.

Mitotsudaira's hand threw a piece of the stone arrangement surrounding the fountain. She forcibly ripped up a stone the size of a child's head and threw it.

Immediately afterwards, the stone burst in midair.

With a clear noise, it scattered into dust and fragments at the midway point between her and the roof of a building to the left.

But Mitotsudaira had already drawn back her left arm and fired a second stone.

“...!”

The swiftly ripped up and thrown stone whistled through the air and hit the spot she had targeted.

She had targeted the roof of a four-story building.

The stone sank into the triangular thatched roof, causing the straw to tear off and dent in. However, that only lasted an instant. The stone struck the ridge pushing up the straw and the entire roof creaked.

“Have some respect and show yourself!”

The force of the impact stored in the roof was released and burst out the other side. At the same time, a figure jumped out from behind the roof. As if urged on by the sounds of breaking wood and scattering straw, the figure jumped diagonally down into the plaza.

They had not fallen down or been knocked down. Mitotsudaira saw the figure float down in a straight line.

She estimated the spot at which this figure would land.

...Did she use the force of the roof's destruction to speed her leap down?

She recognized the figure who had jumped down.

“Trumps 2. F. Walsingham!”

She was a feminine automaton.

Two thorny cross-shaped doll controllers floated behind her back and most of her joints were not connected. Her head and torso, shoulders and elbows, and legs and knees were all floating separately.

Mitotsudaira decided blunt impacts would be of little use, so she instantly chose the optimal technique.

She chose her silver chains.

She would send out the two right ones like a slap, catch the automaton contained within her inner suit, swing her around at high speed, and scrape her against the ground.

Her head and arms would be fine, but Mitotsudaira determined she would win if she could destroy her body.

And so she enacted the plan.

“Here I go.”

She snapped her wrist to accelerate the right silver chains like a whip. She targeted this opponent who was descending with a jump.

And just as Mitotsudaira thought she had hit, she saw something.

The silver chains passed through her flying opponent with no resistance.

“...!?”

She was taken aback, but she accurately took in the information. She understood why her silver chains had failed.

...She destroyed her own body!?

Walsingham’s evasion method was simple.

As she flew through the air, she separated her body within the inner suit.

Automatons had a few different characteristics as artificial objects, but there was one common to all of them. Namely, they moved their artificial body using some kind of technology.

For example, Horizon used artificial muscles and “Musashi” used wire cylinders for some parts. However, Walsingham was different.

...She moves solely via gravitational control!?

Gravitational control was one unique feature of automatons and she used it on her own body.

And that applied to her torso as well as her limbs.

But the torso could be called an automaton’s main body. The internal organs that provided output and fuel were contained there. To take apart her torso as well, the makeup of her parts would have to be somehow special.

...And she would need extreme precision with her gravitational control!

But she had indeed done it.

Her inner suit may have been no different from a bag to contain her parts when she released the inner connections of her torso. But as the silver chains flew toward her, the part-filled bag casually changed shape to escape the binding light.

“Riding,” said a sign frame.

She rotated in midair as if performing a cartwheel and reformed her body in the process.

“Success.”

The sign frame’s message appeared just as she landed on the ground while down on one knee.

Mitotsudaira sent another attack.

She used her two left silver chains to grab two of the benches surrounding the fountain on four sides. She pulled back the right silver chains by swinging them up and then she used them to grab the other two benches.

Mitotsudaira understood how dangerous this enemy was. After all, this English automaton named Walsingham had evaded her silver chains just now.

...And she deflected the silver chains when boarding the transport ship!

Mitotsudaira did not know what kind of trick she had used for that, but it was clear she had more than one method of neutralizing Mitotsudaira's silver chains.

“What other tricks do you have up your sleeve!?”

Mitotsudaira needed to continually make one-hit win attacks in order to expose all of her opponent's methods.

And so she slammed the benches down from the sky while using the silver chains to keep Walsingham from evading.

She saw the English automaton take immediate action against the falling benches.

The automaton expressionlessly stood up.

“Mode: Counter attack.”

A sign frame appeared next to her face and the cross-shaped controllers shot up behind her like wings.

The cross-shaped controllers were actually blades with thorn-like undulations.

They produced two attacks.

First, the two blades swung straight up and sliced the first two benches in half. With twin outward-swinging attacks that sent the fragments flying away, the other two benches were destroyed.

Sounds of destruction rang out and splinters flew through the air like spraying water.

After the two blades completed their swings, Walsingham faced Mitotsudaira. She opened her mouth and bared her canines.

“_____”

Mitotsudaira paid it no heed, connected two festival stands together lengthwise, and threw them down from the sky.

Walsingham looked at the next shadow falling from overhead.

A giant attack was coming, but it was an attack that required preparation time and actions.

That was when she understood two things: the four benches from earlier had been camouflage for these festival stands and her enemy was using her full strength in this battle.

And so she made up her mind. She decided to reveal everything she had.

“Shift: Burst mode.”

Four metal pipes were floating around the automaton’s body as if for decoration. She now gathered them in her hands.

And she swung her floating hands to connect the four pipes into a cannon.

“Ready.”

She connected a cross-shaped sword as if sticking it into the front of the cannon. This created a giant cross-shaped spear.

“That is the cross cannon you used for the shot from above earlier!”

“Testament.”

Walsingham fired. The ether light produced by the cannon was amplified inside the cross sword.

“Fire.”

When the shot hit the two festival stands, they literally exploded.

The impact caused the stands to swell up and then burst. Snacks and fruit of all colors scattered everywhere.

But Mitotsudaira gave new motion to the silver chains.

...There is still a technique I have not seen!

Namely...

...The mysterious technique she used to deflect the silver chain when she visited the transport ship!

As the chain had wrapped around her, she had deflected the entire chain outwards all at once. That was a fatal technique for the silver chains, so Mitotsudaira needed to be check on it. And so she gave new instructions to the silver chains.

“Close her in!”

The silver chains surrounding Walsingham formed four silver rings that instantly closed in on her.

The action was similar to shutting a mouth. When carried out by high-speed chains, it would tighten around the automaton from all directions.

The attack came from a total of eight directions. She added in diagonal angles to make it even harder to evade.

In response, Walsingham lowered her cross spear.

Too slow, thought Mitotsudaira.

The spear was heavy and it could not pick up enough initial velocity to slice through the chains. She had made it in time to cut the benches, but she would be unable to keep up with the speed of the chains themselves.

And the chains closed.

“How about this!?”

That question was immediately followed by a noise.

Countless painful and high-pitched noises of metal against metal rang out, but they seemed to produce a single unified howl. And then she faced the result.

“!?”

All of the silver chains had been deflected away from Walsingham with the same force as their flight in.

This was the same as on the transport ship. Walsingham had deflected the silver chains.

The four silver chains bent into a question mark shape because they did not understand how they had been rejected.

But after a few moments, Mitotsudaira saw what had deflected them.

They were...

“Knives?”

Handle-less blades floated around Walsingham. They were about twenty centimeters long and seven centimeters wide, and they were nothing but blade from front to back.

Thirty two of them floated in the air.

But these blades had not just suddenly appeared.

...These are the parts that made up the thorn-like blades of her cross swords.

The swords had lost their thorns, but more solid undulations remained where the thorns bases had been.

Meanwhile, Walsingham raised her eyebrows slightly as she faced Mitotsudaira.

“Wars of the Roses.”

As she said that, three more blades split off from each of the 32 blades, increasing the number fourfold.

There were now 128.

But they were still thick enough to split further. She could likely use over a thousand of them.

And Mitotsudaira finally came to an understanding. It was indeed possible to deflect her silver chains with all those swords.

The method was simple. The automaton would predict the movement of the chain wrapping around her and simultaneously send one of the blades into each and every link of the chain. That would prevent the chain from wrapping and fully reject it in an instant.

...But that would require incredibly fine control.

And yet F. Walsingham had done it.

Mitotsudaira knew that Walsingham was the head of England's public morals committee. Her duty was to sneak spies into other nations and hunt down the spies in her own nation.

Historically, Walsingham had organized the secret police protecting England and handled the scheming behind the scenes while William Cecil had handled the official politics.

...And in doing so, Walsingham supported England's prosperity using information about the armada battle.

Walsingham had also been the one to expose Mary Stuart's plan to assassinate Elizabeth.

But...

"Historically, the queen hated you and called you a villain."

"No," said Walsingham.

She lightly shook her head and remained expressionless.

"She calls me an 'Untamed Gundog'."

That was her Urban Name.

She swung up both her arms.

"Go," she said. "Go, dogs. Gun dogs."

She faced Mitotsudaira.

"La la la la."

The Wars of the Roses spiraled around in the air.

"Bite a tamed wolf!"

The gundog attacked with everything she had. It formed a motion resembling a surging wave.

The festival wind blew gently around London.

That wind carried the city's smells to a fountain plaza bordering Soho's nature district. Two people sat on the stone edge of the fountain.

One was a boy wearing a Far Eastern uniform and the other as a silver-haired automaton girl. The automaton quietly faced forward while wearing an English uniform with the sleeves removed and a hat with feather decorations.

But as they sat on the edge of the fountain, the boy suddenly stood up and stretched.

"Okay, Horizon. How about we get something light to eat at that stand?"

"Should we really do that?"

He gave her a smile that said "Why not?"

"Toori-sama, my automaton senses have been picking up a sort of reverberation for a while now. To be blunt, I have determined that most of London has been enclosed in some sort of barrier."

"I know."

Toori's nod made her frown slightly.

But he lightly patted her shoulder.

"Sis and the others pursuing us disappeared a while back. I thought they'd catch up to us or spy on us if we sat here, but they didn't."

"If it is some sort of trouble, I have determined you are in danger. After all, you are the chancellor and student council president."

“I’m in no danger.”

“Why not? How can you be so sure?”

He shrugged.

“Because the others will protect us. Even if sis and all the others have gone off somewhere else, the fact that we’re okay means they’re protecting us. If we need to escape, they’ll find some way to let us know, but they haven’t told us anything.”

He looked around the area. He glanced at all the festival stands surrounding the fountain plaza.

“That means they’re telling us to do our thing while they handle all the problems.”

“But all you and I can do is...”

“Have our date!!”

“...discuss whether I am interested in emotions and let you decide on your policy based on that. That will determine Musashi’s actions for the future.”

“Ehhh?”

As Toori pouted his lips, Horizon narrowed her eyes and sighed.

“At any rate.” She stood up, took a step ahead of him, turned around, and tilted her head. “This is a valuable situation that the others have given us with their protection. This evening, we will attend a party at Oxford Academy and hold a meeting between Musashi and England. If we can determine our stances by then, it should hold great meaning. After all, this decision will form a basis for our dealings with other nations. So, Toori-sama. Please thank everyone so they will not feel sad. And please take this date seriously. I currently hold no interest in my emotions and am actually wary of them. Please use this date to teach me whether gaining emotions has enough meaning to overturn that. Also, please decide

whether there is truly meaning in attempting to conquer the world with Musashi and my Logismoi Oplo. If I have no interest in my emotions, I do not understand what meaning there is in retrieving the Logismoi Oplo.”

“It sounds like this date is gonna be a real battle. I hope I’ll be okay.”

“Judge,” replied Horizon. As she stood before him, she held out her hand. “I have determined you can be your normal self. That is what everyone else is fighting to allow. After all, no one would trust or want a serious version of you or a decision made by that version of you. So please come to your decision in your normal way.”

“Sure,” he said as he reached for her outstretched hand. “I’ll tell everyone that their efforts really saved us. Sis, Nate, Asama, and all the others would probably get mad at me if I got all serious out of consideration for them. They’d say we wasted their efforts because they were trying to protect this time for us to enjoy ourselves. So let’s take this date seriously but not get serious ourselves, Horizon. Let’s act like idiots, talk about what matters to us, thank the others, and make the most of this time. And once it’s over, we can find the others while they’re exhausted and tell them all about it. We’ll make sure they know how valuable and enjoyable the time they gave us was.”

And just as Toori and Horizon began walking hand in hand with the backing of everyone’s assistance, Tenzou and Scarred arrived at London.

The two walked with an unfamiliar sense of distance, but they still spoke to each other.

Meanwhile, Musashi’s representatives and England’s representatives continued their battles as if taking their respective hands.

The festival’s actors had been gathered. They were all aware of their roles and they took action to determine the flow of events on the stage.

That flow would determine the fates of both England and Musashi.

The sounds of those duels added even more noise to the festival leading to the two nations' party and meeting.

Afterword

Here it is at last. Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon 2-A has arrived.

Anyway, this begins Volume 2 of this series that can't quite be called SF or fantasy. This is the beloved England volume. England hasn't been the stage since Aerial City, so it feels like it has been a very long time.

During this age, England is prospering under Elizabeth's rule, but I feel like that prosperity was achieved by dashing across a tightrope. There are movies based on this, so if you are interested, it might be fun to hunt them down in the name of studying world history. A lot of material about England from the middle ages to present time has been translated into Japanese, so it could help you study for making fantasy or steampunk stories. (There should be a British history corner in the bookstore.)

Anyway, time for the chat. Or rather, email.

"You can say whatever you want for about seven lines. A painful story from your student days would be most welcome."

"After transferring schools during elementary school, I gained the nickname Heart-sama."

"Don't try to tell a story about running into the Morning Blue Dragon on the first random encounter of the 10th basement. Remember how much space I'm giving you."

"Anyway, I did karate in elementary school."

"Were the kids at your school surprised to find you were the Fat Dragon rather than Heart-sama?"

“Well, it turned out there was another kid with the nickname Heart-sama before me.”

“You had a clone?”

“No, the first one was short. I named him Junior Heart-sama and we exterminated the North Star Army together.”

“That’s an amusing scene to imagine, but doesn’t it completely ignore the original story?”

“The trend was set when Kenshirou was locked in the girls’ bathroom. And there was definitely a parallel world where Heart-sama ruled the world.”

“You don’t get to talk in my afterword anymore.”

“During class, I would suddenly point at the person in front of me and shout ‘you’re Rin today!’ which would make them shriek. Thinking back, that counts as disrupting class, doesn’t it?”

Don’t ask me. Anyway, this novel was spent on the arrival.

“Who is the greediest?”

I’ll leave you with that. My background music while working was Nakamori Akina’s Aibu. (It’s a cool song, especially with the singer’s personality.)

The second half should come next month. Please wait just a bit longer.

April 2009. A morning of wondering if the pollen is gone.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. [Jump up](#) ↑ The Japanese term usually translated as “apocalypse” technically refers to the Latter Day of the Law in Buddhism.
2. [Jump up](#) ↑ The “man” of Norman and the “co” of Conquest create “manko” which is Japanese slang for vagina. In addition, the “nor” of Norman is written as “noru” which is Japanese for “to mount”.
3. [Jump up](#) ↑ The “ger” of German is written the same as Japanese for “gel”.
4. [Jump up](#) ↑ Literally means “Eight Ships Leap” and refers to Minamoto no Yoshitsune jumping from ship to ship to escape Taira no Noritsune during the Battle of Dan-no-Ura.
5. [Jump up](#) ↑ 83 can be pronounced Hassan.
6. [Jump up](#) ↑ Flat Chronicles and Non-Flat Chronicles are a play on words based on the Taiheiki and the Nan-Taiheiki respectively.
7. [Jump up](#) ↑ Basara was a slang term used an intensifier that was common in the Nanboku-cho period of Japan.